DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 477 647 EA 032 552

AUTHOR	Roza, Marguerite
TITLE	A Matter of Definition: Is There Truly a Shortage of School Principals?
INSTITUTION	Washington Univ., Seattle. Center on Reinventing Public Education.
SPONS AGENCY	DeWitt Wallace/Reader's Digest Fund, Pleasantville, NY.
PUB DATE	2003-01-00
NOTE	62p.; With Mary Beth Celio, James Harvey, and Susan Wishon.
AVAILABLE FROM	Center on Reinventing Public Education, Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs, University of Washington, Box 353060, Seattle, WA 98195-3060. Tel: 206-685-2214; Fax: 206-221-7402; e-mail: crpe@u.washington.edu; Web site: http://www.crpe.org/. For full text: http://www.crpe.org/pubs/pdf/mroza_princshortagewb.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Research (143) -- Tests/Questionnaires (160)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Administrator Characteristics; *Administrator Qualifications; *Administrator Selection; Administrators; Assistant Principals; Beginning Principals; Educational Administration; Elementary Secondary Education; Employment Opportunities; Human Resources; *Instructional Leadership; Labor Market; *Principals; Recruitment; School Administration; Supply and Demand
IDENTIFIERS	*Administrator Supply and Demand

ABSTRACT

Although some districts and areas have experienced difficulty finding good principals, there are far more candidates certified to be principals than there are principal vacancies to fill. This report describes a study based on a written indepth survey of human-resource directors supplemented by formal survey questions to school superintendents and more than 150 telephone interviews with district staff, school organizations, and state officials. The study found that, despite widespread publicity about a universal shortage of principals, shortages are not the norm. Where there have been reductions in the number of certified candidates, these conditions are district- and even school-specific and are more pronounced at the secondary level than the elementary level. In addition, perceptions of the shortage are driven by demands for a new and different kind of school principal. In many ways the purported shortage is a matter of definition. Although there are plenty of certified applicants, there seems to be a dearth of candidates with high-level leadership skills. The survey instruments used in the study are included in two appendices. (Author)

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A Matter of Definition: Is There Truly a Shortage of School Principals?

Marguerite Roza

January 2003

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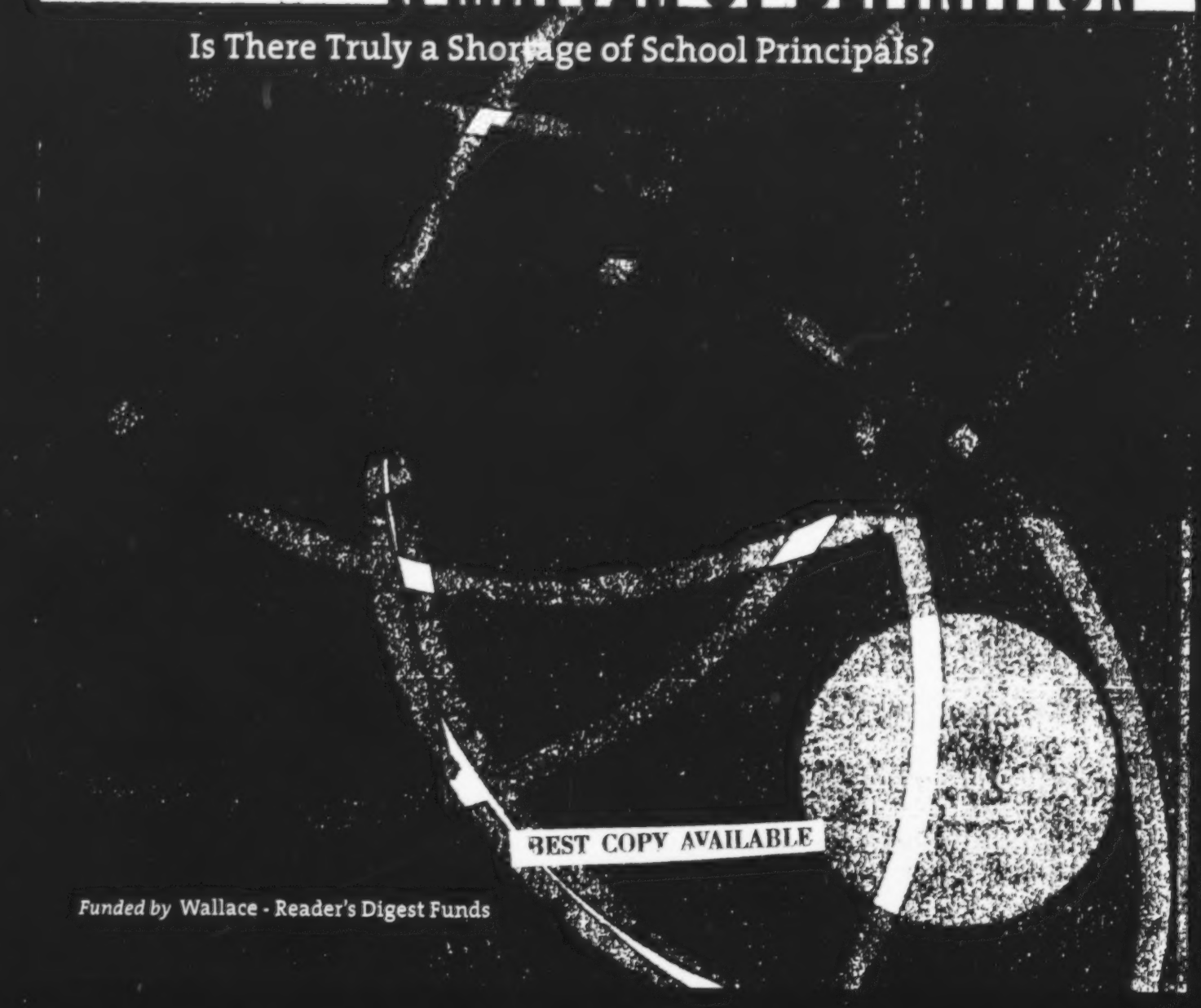
A MATTER OF DEFINITION

Is There Truly a Shortage of School Principals?



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January 2003

A Matter of Definition:
Is There Truly a Shortage of School Principals?

Marguerite Roza

with
Mary Beth Celio
James Harvey
Susan Wishon

A Report to the Wallace - Reader's Digest Funds
From the
Center on Reinventing Public Education
Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs
University of Washington

"...although some districts experience trouble filling vacancies in the principal's chair, there are far more people certified to be school principals around the nation than jobs for them to fill."

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Acknowledgments

The authors want to express their gratitude for the contributions many people made to the work described in this report.

Our first acknowledgment goes to the board and officers of Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds for their support of the Leaders Count program that financed this research. In particular, we want to thank the president of Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds, Christine DeVita, for her commitment to this effort. Education program director Mary Lee Fitzgerald was a committed supporter of the Center's work. And two program officers at the Funds, Sam Cargile and Kimberly Jinnett, served as thoughtful friends and critics who helped keep us on track.

We also want to acknowledge the contributions of **Paul T. Hill**, director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington's Evans School for Public Affairs. Tapped to serve as Acting Dean of the Evans Schools in the midst of this research, Paul was an untiring source of insights, advice and constructive criticism throughout the course of this project. Our work would neither have been launched nor finished without him.

We thank the hard-working staff members and graduate students at the **Center for Reinventing Public Education** who helped advance our work. Julie Angeley, Jennifer Summers, and Shannon Gentry took responsibility for design and lay out of the report. Gwyn Hinton managed the project's finances and helped keep us within budget. Meaghan McElroy and Lydia Rainey helped create and tabulate the superintendents questionnaire on which we drew.

We appreciate the contributions of **William Boyd**, Pennsylvania State University, and **Susan Gates**, the RAND Corporation, for their capable and thoughtful comments on an earlier version of this report. Their thinking helped shape the final product, although the reviewers, of course, bear no responsibility for any errors, omissions, or mistakes in facts or judgment in this document.

Finally, we acknowledge the contributions of district human resource officials who took the time to meet with us or respond to our questions. We are greatly in their debt.

Although some districts and areas are experiencing difficulties finding good school principals, there are far more candidates certified to be principals than there are principal vacancies to fill. This is true even in regions of high enrollment growth.

Based on a written, in-depth survey of human resource directors supplemented by formal survey questions to school superintendents and more than 150 telephone interviews with district staff, school organizations and state officials, this study concludes that, despite widespread publicity about a universal shortage of principals, "shortages" are not the norm. Where there have been reductions in the number of certified candidates, these conditions are district and even school-specific and are more pronounced at the secondary than the elementary level. In addition, perceptions of the "shortage" are driven by demands for a new and different kind of school principal. In many ways, the purported "shortage" is a matter of definition. There are plenty of "certified" applicants, but there seems to be a dearth of candidates with high-level leadership skills.

Supply

With respect to the supply of principal candidates, the study finds that:

- The average district receives 17 applicants for each principal's position it is trying to fill, a modest decline of perhaps two applicants per position over seven years.
- Nearly two-thirds of human resource directors report little difficulty finding principals.
- In most regional labor markets studied, increased numbers of applicants in some districts are offset by decreases or no change in others. Within each metropolitan area, the real problem is one of distribution, not inadequate supply.
- That is to say, some districts (and schools within districts) are avoided by prospective principals. Districts and schools with the fewest applicants are typically those with the most challenging working conditions, higher concentrations of poor and minority students, and lower salaries for principals. Taken together, these factors generally separate the high "need" districts from the rest.
- Rural educators, who receive the lowest number of applicants per position, are largely unconcerned about the situation, confident they can identify needs in advance and groom the leaders they need.

- Since it does not address principal-distribution problems, a strategy of expanding training programs is not a sensible solution to the issues identified in this research.

Demand

With respect to demand for principals, the Center finds that:

- A serious gap exists between what superintendents say they want in new principals and the experiences human resource departments rely on to screen candidates.

- Superintendents are more interested in the leadership experience and talent of prospective principals than in candidates' administrative or management skill. More than 90% of superintendents agree that motivating staff, holding them accountable and implementing a school-improvement strategy are important responsibilities of principals.

- Conversely, only one-third of superintendents point to teaching experience as a highly significant qualification for principals, and only one-fifth cite a background in curriculum as important.

- Human resource departments march to a different drummer. While asserting they want people with leadership skills, human resource departments default to traditional qualifications, relying primarily on substantial years of teaching experience to cull their candidates. New principal hires now average 14 years teaching experience.

- Non-traditional candidates—no matter how successful in business, law, or the non-profit world—are not seriously considered by human resource departments for positions as principals.

- While human resource directors are quite satisfied with their new hires, superintendents continue to express dissatisfaction about inadequate leadership capabilities of new principals.

- Human resource directors report a number of strategies to try to find more capable candidates. They develop "grow your own" strategies to identify and groom promising candidates; they modify the position or its remuneration; and they recruit principals out of retirement. Meanwhile, they avoid non-traditional candidates (although acknowledging that the few who make it through the screen are impressive).

Addressing Supply and Demand

Many other reports on principal "shortages" conclude with policy recommendations that do not remedy the challenges identified by the data in this report. For instance, expanded training programs and larger applicant pools will not address the distribution challenges in districts and schools most in need of more candidates. This study's findings suggest the need to:

1. **Get the incentives right.** Policymakers should adjust incentives to make non-competitive districts and schools more attractive to potential candidates. Districts, in particular, should use salaries to make tougher school assignments more desirable for the best candidates. In addition, state leaders should be prepared to help adjust salaries among districts to address the distribution challenges identified in this document. This recommendation points to a role for policymakers at the district and state levels.

2. **Make sure the left hand knows what the right is doing.** Hiring criteria in human resource offices should be aligned with the experience and skills sought by superintendents. A re-examination of the barriers to entry for school leadership is also in order and more research is essential to clarify the link between qualifications and desired attributes. Finally, if potentially successful non-traditional candidates are to be hired, special training opportunities to provide individualized and on-demand professional development are needed. This cluster of recommendations points to roles for government, researchers, and philanthropy as well as for schools, colleges, and departments of education.

3. **Redefine the principal position if necessary.** In districts unable to access highly talented principals, district leaders should consider alternative leadership arrangements, potentially combining the leadership skills of one individual with the curriculum and instructional expertise of another. Such an approach permits districts to draw on all the talents and skills available to it. This recommendation points to a role for legislators, state departments of education and local school boards.

As this report makes clear, the nature of the "shortage" of school principals in the United States is very much a matter of definition. Responses to the challenge must meet the "shortage" as it is accurately defined.

Despite the almost universally accepted notion that school districts in the United States do not have enough principals to staff their schools, very little concrete data has been produced to support this view. Although New York City public schools have reported fewer applicants per opening, [1] most other reports include only anecdotal information. Or they describe perceptions of shortages, turnover, retirements or dissatisfaction. Quantitative data are rarely provided on what is really happening with the supply of principals across districts and regions.

This study was designed specifically to quantify the extent of recent changes in the supply of principal candidates as part of a major Wallace - Reader's Digest Funds examination of education leadership. The principals study was launched both to define the dimensions of the challenge and to investigate the impact of any real shortages on various types of school systems in different regions of the country.

Wallace - Reader's Digest Funds Study

The study reported here is part of a major, multi-year, multi-million dollar effort by the Wallace - Reader's Digest Funds to help improve and develop new leadership for American schools.

The goal of the Center's larger, three-year examination was to stimulate and inform a national discussion about four challenges related to the hiring of principals and superintendents: perceived leadership shortages, inadequate training, poor understanding of leaders' roles, and a general lack of ownership of the supply problem.

This study is one of five efforts supported at the Center as part of the Wallace - Reader's Digest Funds effort. *A Matter of Definition* restricts itself exclusively to an examination of principal applicant pools and the extent to which district leaders in diverse regions experience problems filling building leadership positions. Other reports from the Center will be devoted to school superintendents, human resource development, the role and responsibilities of the principal, and indicators of community support for schools.

Study Procedures

The goal of the work reported here was to understand what the term "principal shortage" means for public schools. Are certain districts experiencing difficulty finding principals? Are things getting better or worse for these districts? What do the applicant pools look like (in terms of both quantity and quality)? How well do applicants match up with current demand? Finally, how are districts responding to the challenges they encounter, particularly in areas where the number of candidates is declining?

This report draws on four major sources of information. First, the study team surveyed 83 public school districts in 10 regions around the country thought to be struggling to fill principal vacancies. Most of these regions, which are defined in Part One of this report, were large metropolitan areas or sets of neighboring counties. What they had in common was either high population growth or reports of education labor shortages. Each of these regions functions in many ways as its own labor market, and each includes several autonomous school districts.

The team asked district personnel within these regions to dig into their files to provide data on current principal applicant pools and also on applicant pools of five or ten years earlier. The study team was interested in understanding how the size and quality of these applicant pools had changed over time. It also wanted to determine if different districts within the same labor market were experiencing the same difficulties. Finally, the team asked human resource directors about the experience they seek in a candidate. What characteristics are hardest to find? How do districts respond when candidates do not meet district needs?

To better understand the hiring process, the team next followed up with more than 150 phone interviews with district officials, association representatives, and building leaders in both public and private schools. In particular, these follow-up interviews examined how the hiring process responds to changing demands for principal candidates. The team compared notes with interviews from charter schools, private schools, and Catholic archdioceses to explore similarities and differences.

Third, to explore superintendents' views about principal shortages, the team took advantage of the existence of a separate survey of school superintendents being conducted by the Center as part of the larger Wallace - Reader's Digest Funds effort. This survey of 100 large-district superintendents offered the study team an opportunity to explore superintendents' views about desirable attributes and experiences in new school principals.

Finally, the team supplemented its findings with data from several federal data bases from the National Center on Education Statistics, primarily from the Schools and Staffing Survey, supplemented by the Common Core of Data. Although somewhat limited in utility for this study due to its tardy release, the SASS data did provide a useful snapshot of how principals' background and experience has changed over time.

"Nation's schools struggling to find enough principals."

—New York Times headline September 3, 2000

The issue of principal shortages has loomed larger ever since the role of the principal as a leader of learning has assumed greater importance. As districts started feeling greater pressure to increase student performance in all schools, they have focused on the principal, placing responsibility for school achievement in his or her hands. Simultaneously, in areas experiencing high population growth (or in districts worried about turnover and retirement among principals), districts are forced to find many new building leaders. And with high stakes accountability in place in virtually every state, districts have been searching for principals who can deliver results now, not at some point in the vague and indeterminate future.

For all of these reasons, district leaders and policy makers have grown much more interested in the supply of principals. Yet to date, most information about "shortages" has been largely anecdotal, composed, for the most part, of reports about a few high-profile districts suffering from high turnover or experiencing difficulty finding certified applicants. Other studies have examined how attractive the job is, interviewing principals to show how difficult it has become. To date, very limited quantitative information has been provided to help policy makers understand the magnitude of the supply problem or how pervasive it is.

This study set out to fill in some of these gaps. It attempts to analyze the "shortage" of principals in basic economic terms of supply and demand. That is to say, it tries to avoid entangling the "shortage" issue with anecdotes about problem hiring situations or complaints about the difficulty of the job. Instead, it asks fairly straightforward questions: Is the supply of people capable of filling the principal's position adequate to fill vacancies as they occur? Is the number of vacancies increasing or decreasing? Or to ask the same questions in a different way, is the demand for principals increasing or decreasing? Do entry-level qualifications for the principalship appear restrictive or arbitrary? If so, what might be done about that?

In fact, what we find is that the principals' "shortage" is a matter of definition. Were there a genuine shortage we would expect to find decreases in the number of applicants per available position. Or we might even find districts appointing individuals to lead schools who would not even have been considered five or ten years ago. Neither expectation was realized. Although some individual districts (and schools within districts) report problems, even in the most challenged regions covered in this study, districts have more than enough applicants, for the most part, to fill their vacancies. And, far from lowering standards, districts appear to be raising the bar, at least in terms of the

number of years of teaching experience they seek from applicants.

The findings presented here need to be understood in the context of district hiring practices, which can appear opaque and mysterious, even to school employees. In districts with more than a handful of schools, recruiting and hiring principals is delegated to specialized offices, sometimes called the Personnel Office but usually named the Human Resource Office or Division. Superintendents play a role in determining the number of people to be hired and in final selection. But, in most districts, advertising and initial review of applications are delegated to human resource departments. Human resources' staff post and recruit for open positions, field inquiries, and collect applications. Candidates normally submit their applications directly to the human resource office, not to a particular school, but they are likely to specify the school (or schools) in which they are interested. This office normally completes a preliminary screening of applicants to eliminate those who do not meet minimal criteria (e.g., "has three years of teaching experience" and "holds a principal's certificate"). Typically the human resource staff will evaluate and rank candidates who survived past the initial screening and forward the most promising on to the superintendent for final selection.

Structure of Report

This report is in three parts. Part One examines the *supply* of candidates. It presents data on who is applying for these jobs and in which districts. This section reports on which type of district is hit hardest, and how the supply of candidates has changed in recent years. And it looks at accumulating evidence about principal training programs and whether these training programs are producing enough certified candidates for openings. The section concludes with data and commentary on how districts are coping with shortages as they perceive them.

Part Two highlights the realities of the *demand* for principals. It profiles both what superintendents claim they need and trends in how human resource departments operate in light of pressures and perceived shortages.

In Part Three, the team presents three recommendations, each designed to address a distinct element of principal supply and demand.

This report provides new insights into the conventional wisdom holding that a "shortage" of school principals is endemic. Shortages do exist in some schools and in some districts. But the reality is that there are far more people "qualified" for a principalship in the United States than there are jobs for them to fill. The challenge

policy makers face is how to tackle the distribution challenge by getting certified candidates where they are most needed. An equally important challenge for all district leaders is how to find and hire the best people, utilizing the talent available to them to meet school leadership needs. This report suggests ways to begin meeting those challenges.

Paul T. Hill
Director, Center on Reinventing Public Education
Acting Dean, Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs
January, 2003

Principals: What Do We Know About Supply?

Ask virtually any school superintendent, policy maker, or reasonably well-informed education observer about the state of the school principalship today and most are likely to cite a shortage of candidates as a real problem. Practically all educators are inclined to agree that the problem is significant...if not in their own district, at least in others, and, if not today in "my district," certainly something that can be anticipated tomorrow.

For the most part, these perceptions grow out of a series of recent studies and analyses, buttressed by disturbing anecdotal evidence. These studies were completed by the national associations representing elementary and secondary school principals, states worried about potential shortages, and association or state surveys of principal training programs and of educators awarded principals licenses who elected not to become building leaders.[2]

Among the major findings from these efforts:

- A shortage of qualified candidates for principal vacancies in the United States exists, among all kinds of schools (rural, urban, and suburban) and all levels of schools (elementary, middle, and high school).[3]
- Vermont is "scrambling to fill principals' positions."[4]
- Half of the Mississippi superintendents surveyed reported trouble filling high school principal openings, more than one-third and 40%, respectively, reporting similar difficulties with middle and elementary schools.[5]
- The "trend toward diminishing interest in school leadership roles [in the state of Washington] is alarming."[6]
- A shortage of qualified secondary principals definitely exists in Maryland, in the unanimous opinion of superintendents, principals, and assistant and aspiring principals contacted. This shortage "can only worsen in coming years," in the view of the Maryland State Department of Education.[7]

Yet it turns out that all of these conclusions turn on the perceptions and opinions of superintendents, principals, and other educational leaders. Quantitative data on the nature and the extent of the shortage are hard to find. The conventional wisdom about principal shortages appears to be self-reinforcing, a phenomenon built on troubling anecdotes, a belief that the quality of today's candidates does not match that of yesterday's, and a conviction that the leadership demands on today's principal require more highly-capable candidates.

What is also missing in these analyses is a clear explanation of what has happened to the principal applicant pool and how these changes, if any, play themselves out among different districts. Is the applicant pool really shrinking? If so, by how much? Is the issue one of applicant quantity (which is often how it is expressed) or is it more one of applicant quality?

Based on the evidence presented in this report, the Center concludes that although some districts and regions are experiencing trouble filling vacancies in the principal's chair, there are far more people certified to be school principals around the nation than jobs for them to fill. Real declines in applicant pools are district- and even school-specific. They are also more pronounced at the secondary level than in elementary schools. For many districts, difficulties in hiring are driven more by demands for a new and different kind of school principal. This situation implies that policy responses to the "shortage" should not be universal nostrums, uniform efforts to increase the supply of candidates. Instead, policies carefully tailored to the nature of the problem and how it plays itself out in different kinds of districts offer much more promise of success.

The study explored both the supply and demand side of the equation for school principals, that is to say the supply of candidates for school leadership positions and the demand from school districts. This chapter explores the supply side: the size of the applicant pool and how it has changed over time.

The Applicant Pool: How Big Is It and How Has It Changed?

One of the first issues the study set out to address was the size of the applicant pool. Responses from a survey of 83 districts in ten regions were used to examine these issues. Most of these regions are located in large metropolitan areas or neighboring counties with high population growth or reports of education labor shortages. They generally function as their own labor markets (See Table 1). For each region, a few rural districts were also included for comparison.

The survey was a written questionnaire of 28 items investigating current and past applicant pools in comparison to the number of openings, changing needs in the district, and recruitment and hiring process. (The survey can be found in Appendix A.)

Overall, according to survey responses, the average district among the 83 surveyed receives 17 applicants for each principal's position it is trying to fill. The average, of course, conceals a lot of variation. As discussed below, some districts receive less than three applicants per position, some receive more than 40. However, a national average of 17 applicants per position seems adequate, assuming most of them are capable of performing the job. So the question of whether this is

a lot of applicants (or so few as to constitute a crisis) depends, in many ways, on the quality of the applicants and on whether the number of applicants has declined over time.

Regions	Number of Districts Responding
Atlanta and surrounding counties	11
Chicago and surrounding areas	9
Dallas metropolitan area	8
Los Angeles metropolitan area	9
New Mexico	2
Orlando, FL and surrounding counties	8
Philadelphia and surrounding counties	9
Phoenix Area	7
San Diego metropolitan area	8
Santa Clara metropolitan area	12
Total Districts	**83**

Table 1
The Survey of Human Resource Directors Targeted Districts in 10 Regions

Is the Number of Applicants Per Vacancy Growing or Declining?

By way of comparison, the study team asked human resource directors to review their earlier records to determine how the size of the applicant pool was changing. Unfortunately, in nearly all districts, accurate written records do not exist on the size of the applicant pool from year to year. Therefore, the human resource directors were asked to think back to their first year of service in this position in the district, and estimate the applicant pool in that year.[8] For the typical district, this previous date was 1994, or seven years before the survey was administered.

Seven years earlier, according to the recollections of the human resource directors, districts had received slightly more certified applicants (See Figure 1). Human resource directors reported an average of 19 certified applicants per position during their first year on the job, indicating that, on average over seven years, districts have experienced a decline of two certified applicants for each principal's position.

On one hand, Figure 1 confirms that applicant pools are shrinking slightly. However, this shrinkage amounts to an average decline of about 10% over seven years, in districts selected to represent the most severe "shortage" regions. While a 10% decline over that period clearly deserves further investigation, it hardly seems to justify a conclusion that a nationwide principal supply problem exists.

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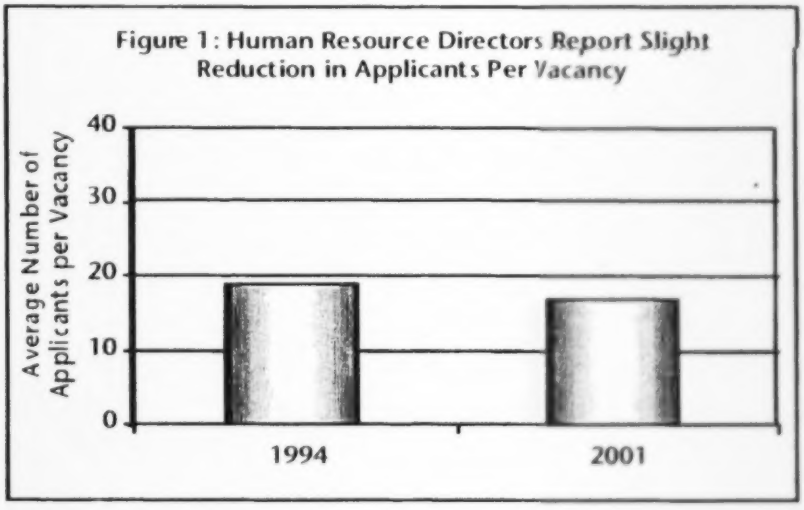
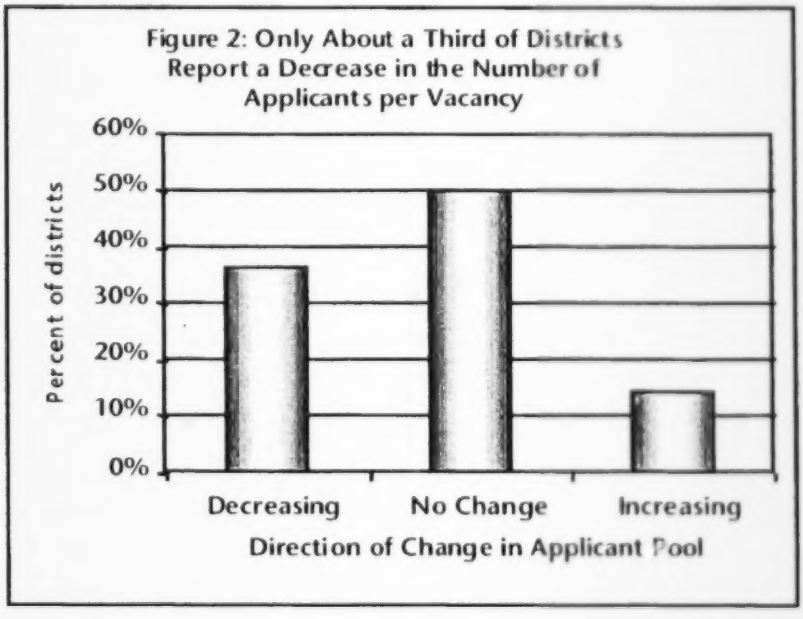


The average also covers a wide range (see Figure 2). The reality is that even in metropolitan and geographic areas selected because they were thought to be experiencing a lot of "shortages" most school districts in these regions experienced *no decline* in applicants. As Figure 2 indicates, nearly two-thirds of human resource directors in the responding districts report no problems with the number of applicants per vacancy. Half the respondents in these high-shortage areas reported their applicant pools were stable over a seven-year period. Perhaps even more surprising, about 14% reported some



growth in the number of applicants per vacancy. Slightly more than one-third (36%) reported decreases.

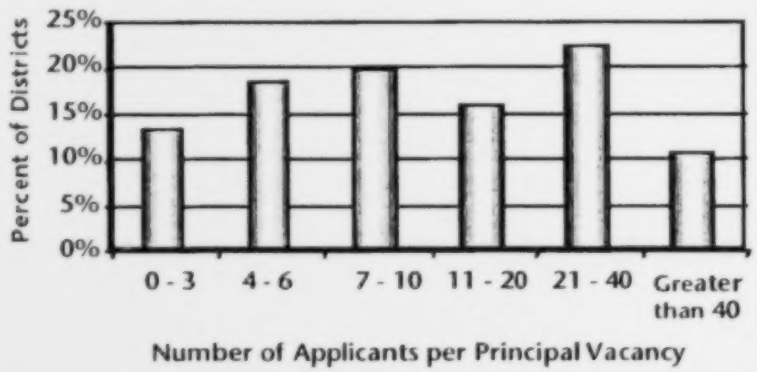
What seems clear from these preliminary examinations of the responses is the following: In regions selected because they were thought to be high-shortage areas, district officials report modest declines over a seven-year period in the number of applicants per district. However, the declines appear to be confined to a limited number of districts in these regions, since nearly two-thirds of respondents report either no change or some growth in the number of applicants.

Applicants Cluster in Some Districts and Avoid Others

Further examination of the responses confirms these initial impressions. Large variations exist among districts in terms of the number of applicants per position. And variations in the rates at which applicant pools are shrinking are equally significant.

First, with respect to applicants per position: As Figure 3 demonstrates, applicant pools among the 83 responding districts ranged from fewer than four applicants per opening to more than 40. Another way to understand Figure 3 is to recognize that about one-third of districts received six applicants per vacancy or less, roughly one-third received between seven and 20, and the remaining third received 21 or more.

Figure 3: The Number of Applicants per Vacancy Varies Substantially Among Districts

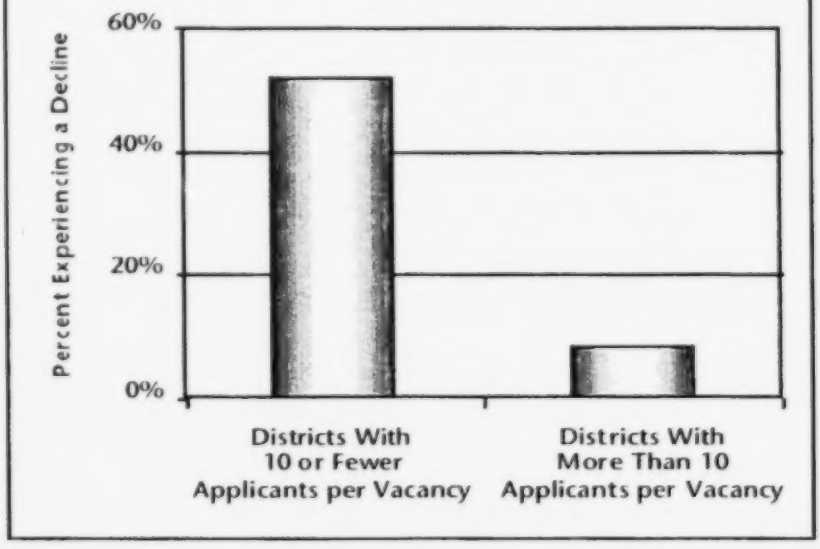


Next, the extent to which applicant pools are shrinking at different rates between districts deserves attention. Comparing present and past applicant pools, the data indicate that some districts report

receiving half as many applicants per vacancy as they received seven years ago, while others report increases. In fact, an analysis of the distribution of applicants among districts over time indicates that *disparities* in applicant pools are growing (see Figure 4). In other words, applicants increasingly cluster in some districts, while avoiding others.

Figure 4 indicates that responding districts with smaller applicant pools (ten or fewer applicants per vacancy) are much more likely to report declines in the number of applicants over the last seven years than districts with historically more applicants. Among districts with more than ten applicants per vacancy, fewer than one in ten reported a decline. Indeed, more than one-fifth of these districts reported increases in the number of applicants per vacancy, compared to only 5% of those with small applicant pools.

Figure 4: Districts With Fewer Applicants per Vacancy Were More Likely to Experience a Decline in the Number of Applicants



The broad pattern described above—stability or modest declines in applicants per vacancy combined with variations in applicant pools—holds true in the aggregate across regions and in nine of the ten regions studied. The only exception is found in the Phoenix area, one of the fastest growing regions in the nation, which sustained a substantial decline in the number of applicants per vacancy. However, the seven districts in the Phoenix area that responded to the survey still had substantially larger numbers of applicants than

other regions (24 per vacancy compared with 17 per vacancy across all regions). Despite this anomalous decline, the issue in the Phoenix area scarcely seems to be cause for alarm, given the surprisingly high number of applicants that remains available.

In each of the other nine regions, increases in some districts were accompanied by decreases or no change in others. What this pattern points to is *not* an overall decline in the number of applicants per vacancy, but rather to a shift among districts within regions. In other words, while the view from some districts is that the situation is getting much worse, the reality is that the number of certified applicants has not changed much.

The implication is clear: Within each region, the real problem is one of distribution not inadequate supply.

Which Districts and Schools Are Hardest Hit?

No single factor can explain which districts have the most difficult time finding applicants. However, some patterns are clear. High growth regions are likely to report shortages. Some districts are shunned by applicants, typically for a combination of reasons. And, within districts, candidates simply avoid certain schools.

Population Growth a Challenge

Fast-growing Sunbelt and Southern regions reported greater declines in applicants per position than older and more settled regions, such as Philadelphia and Chicago. Districts in the Atlanta, Los Angeles, Phoenix, New Mexico, San Diego and Santa Clara regions reported declines in applicants per opening of between 4 and 11 people.

Troubled Districts

What is striking in the data developed from the human resource directors' responses is that virtually every region of the country seems to include districts that applicants avoid. In most regions, the study came across one or more districts that received six or less applicants per opening, while other districts in the same region were averaging 17 or more per vacancy.

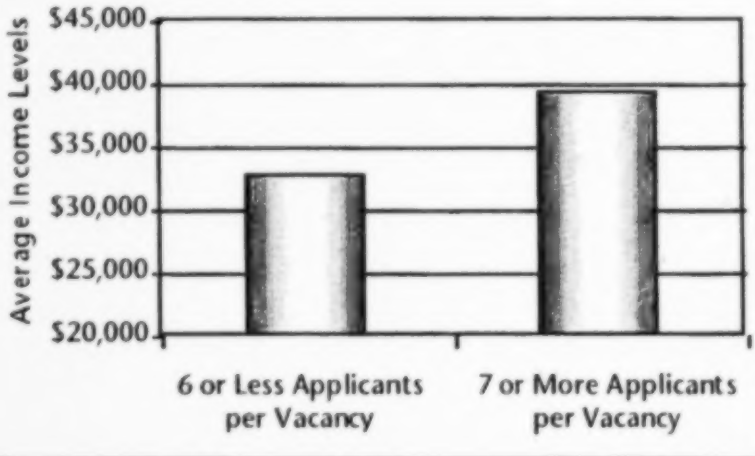
Candidates, it appears, submit their applications to some districts, while consistently avoiding their neighbors. For example, the Los Altos School District in Mountain View, California (Silicon Valley) received more than 40 applicants per vacancy last year. Just 12 miles down the road, one of the San Jose districts received fewer than four per vacancy. Suburban Abington and West Chester districts in Pennsylvania also report 40 or more applicants per principal opening. Nearby Philadelphia, on the other hand, reports only seven to ten per position.

What is true in Silicon Valley and the Philadelphia area is true elsewhere as well: Relatively nearby districts are at opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of whether or not they consider themselves to be experiencing a shortage. Districts with 40 or more applicants per position report that a shortage is not a significant problem for them, whereas districts struggling to find applicants almost inevitably cite a "significant shortage."

In most cases, it appears a series of factors make these districts inherently undesirable. In all the regions studied, the districts with the fewest applicants were those with the most challenging working conditions, higher concentrations of poor and minority students, and lower salaries for principals (see Figures 5, 6, and 7). Three-quarters of these districts had high levels of student poverty and nearly nine out of ten of these districts (88%) had predominantly minority student populations.[9] Taken together, these factors generally separate the highest "need" districts from the rest.

Low Income—Among the districts with the smallest applicant pools, all were in low-price housing areas and low-income communities.[10] Figure 5 compares average community income in districts with ten or fewer applicants and in districts with 11 or more. (The data for Figures 5 and 6 were developed by merging the study's survey data with federal data on income levels, per pupil expenditures, and student demographics.) As is apparent, median income in districts with six or fewer applicants per position is considerably less than median income in districts with seven or more ($32,600 versus $39,200, a difference of 20%).

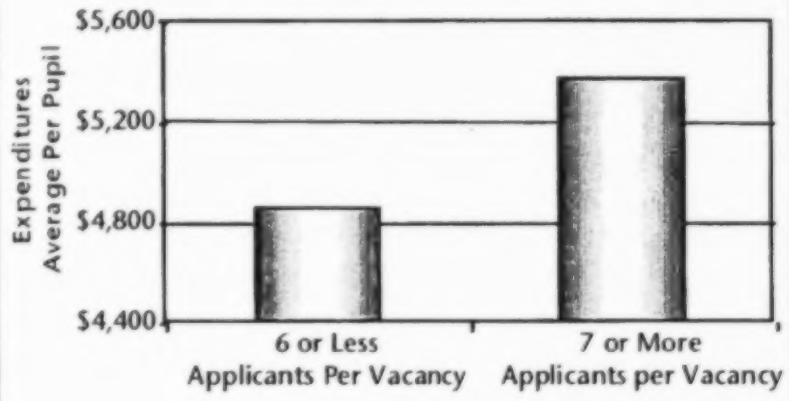
Figure 5: Districts with Fewer Applicants Per Vacancy Are in Areas with Lower Median Income Levels



Districts in low-income areas clearly experience more trouble attracting principal applicants than those in more affluent areas.

Per-Pupil Expenditures—An identical dynamic is at work in terms of per-pupil expenditures. Lower per-pupil expenditures are common among districts experiencing trouble finding principals. Figure 6 displays these findings. Districts with six or fewer applicants per vacancy spent, on average, $4,854 per student; those with seven or more are spending about $5,370 per pupil.

Figure 6: Districts with Fewer Applicants Per Vacancy Have Lower Per Pupil Expenditures

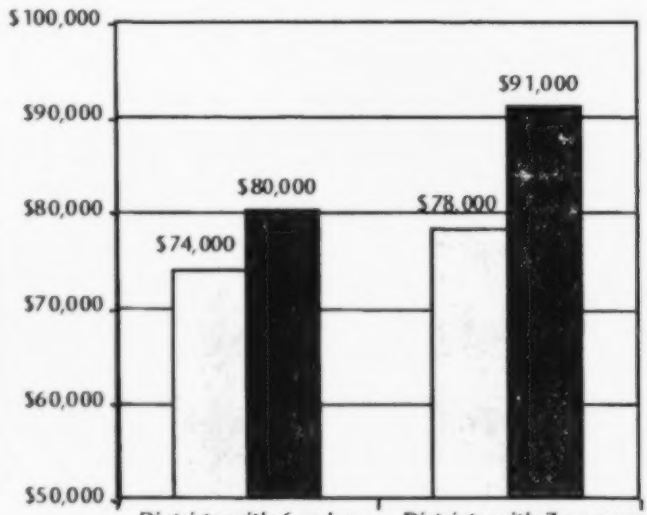


Average Salaries—Finally, salaries make a difference. As Figure 7 indicates, districts with six or fewer applicants per vacancy pay less for both elementary and secondary school principals than districts with ten or more applicants per position. Districts typically maintain at least two salary schedules for school principals, one for elementary principals and another for secondary school leaders. (Frequently too there is a third schedule for middle school principals.) As Figure 7 reveals, low-applicant-pool districts average about $4,000 less annually in salary for elementary school leaders than high-applicant-pool districts, with the differential for secondary school principals even higher—about $11,000.

Clearly financial incentives make a difference.

Although none of these factors—community income, housing costs, incidence of poverty, racial isolation, per-pupil expenditures, or salaries—can by itself explain the entire difference in numbers of applicants between districts, in combination they explain a lot.

Figure 7: Districts with few applicants offer lower average salaries



The reverse of these factors appears to hold true as well: In general, districts with the largest applicant pools had many of the opposite characteristics. Most had fewer children in poverty and higher per-pupil expenditures. These data suggest a set of characteristics that separate a few uncompetitive districts from the others. When districts possess several of these uncompetitive characteristics, applicants are likely to apply elsewhere within the same region.

Although it is not true that those districts with the largest applicant pools were always the wealthiest districts, it is true that they were never the poorest.

Non-Competitive Schools Suffer the Same Fate

A similar combination of factors affects the distribution of applicants among schools *within* districts, according to the study's interview results. As a human resource official in the Philadelphia City School District noted, "There is really quite a difference. We get about 25-30 applicants for an opening in a preferred school, and only about 4-6 for one in the least preferred schools."

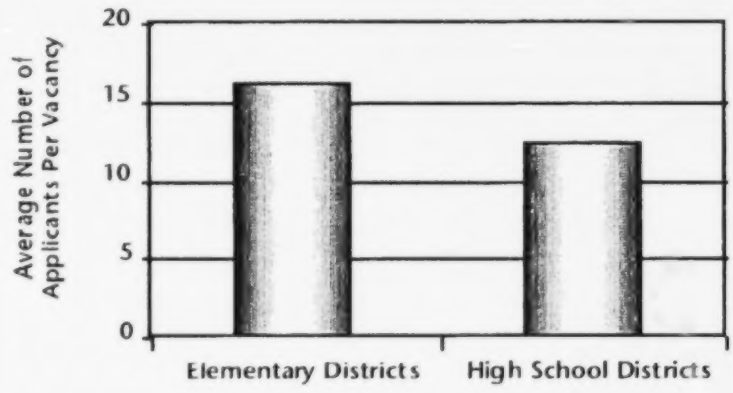
Many school officials could not quantify the difference, as the Phila-

delphia educator could. They often reported, however, that openings are not identified by school, and that some applicants declined to pursue vacancies once they learned the identity of the school. Higher levels of poverty, lower achievement results, and more complex student populations appear to define the less attractive schools.

In addition, study interviews confirmed other reports indicating that principals' positions in high schools are more difficult to fill than are those in elementary schools.[11] This trend was noted by officials in many districts during interviews. "The pool is quite small for the high school principal openings, greater for the middle schools, and larger still for elementary schools," said one district official.

This trend for high schools is particularly apparent when comparisons are drawn between high-school-only districts and elementary-only districts.[12] Figure 8 provides the relevant data: Districts serving only high schools receive an average of 12 applicants per vacancy, while elementary districts received more than 16.

Figure 8: High School Districts Receive Fewer Applicants per Principal Vacancy



In sum, factors similar to those at work in some districts to limit the size of the principal pool appear to be at work within districts relative to particular schools. Schools enrolling high concentrations of complex and more challenging student populations are not attractive to many aspiring principals, a reality that seems particularly apparent at the high school level.

Rural Districts Reveal Different Patterns

Districts experiencing difficulty attracting applicants in the Center's survey tended to be urban or on the fringes of large metropolitan areas. Of the districts defined as "uncompetitive," 74% were urban or located near urban areas.

That is not to say that rural districts do not also experience hiring problems. A few rural districts also suffered from limited numbers of applicants. Yet the patterns in the rural districts were distinctly different from those in larger, more urban areas. As a general matter, rural areas seem to have smaller applicant pools than the average in our survey. That is to say, the number of applicants per rural vacancy was lower than the average across regions (10 candidates per vacancy in rural areas, versus 17 in all ten regions). Yet, this significantly lower number in rural areas is still not as low as the numbers encountered in "uncompetitive districts," defined as six or fewer applicants.

Two other factors about rural districts are also notable. First, rural districts report no measurable change in the size of their applicant pools over the last seven years. Although their applicant pools are small, they are apparently stable, in fact much more stable than the applicant pools in other districts. Second, survey comments from rural school officials reveal little anxiety about their small applicant pools. Several noted that they do not have a lot of applicants, but that they never did. Some also commented on the fact that in smaller communities, anticipating a principal's retirement is easy and the superintendent begins grooming a successor several years in advance.

In brief, although raw data would indicate that problems in rural districts are more severe than those in other areas, this study provides little evidence that rural educators are greatly worried about their situation.

Are Training Programs Providing Adequate Numbers of Candidates?

Many policy recommendations appear grounded in the premise that there are not enough certified principal candidates in the labor market. These proposals then call for expanded training programs and more aggressive identification of potential leaders.[13]

However, several other studies have shown that training programs are producing more than an adequate amount of certified graduates.[14] According to one California study, for example, over 34,000 people hold appropriate California credentials, and there are only 23,000 principal positions.[15] A study of certified principals in Montana indicated that nearly half of those certified had no intention of becoming a principal.[16] The situation in Louisiana is similar: fewer than half of candidates who recently received certification expressed

a willingness to apply for a principalship.[17] It seems there are a lot of people certified to be school principals who have no intention of becoming one.

Among those with principal's credentials, the most common reasons cited for avoiding the position are inadequate compensation, long hours, decreased job security, stress, and added responsibilities associated with the position.[18] Many claim the increase in pay does not justify the extra workload, although evidence on this appears to be more anecdotal than data-driven.[19]

Because a sufficient number of candidates with state credentials already exists--and many are uninterested in applying for available jobs—a solution based on expanding training programs seems illogical at best. Programs would need to recruit and train many more candidates than would be willing to apply for positions, especially in "un-competitive" districts.

Moreover, as the next section indicates, in many districts with a fairly stable supply of candidates, quality of candidates, not quantity, is the issue. What is needed in these districts is higher quality candidates, not simply more of the same.

For Many Districts, the Problem Is About Quality Not Quantity

"It seems like the quality of the applicant pool has changed more than the quantity."

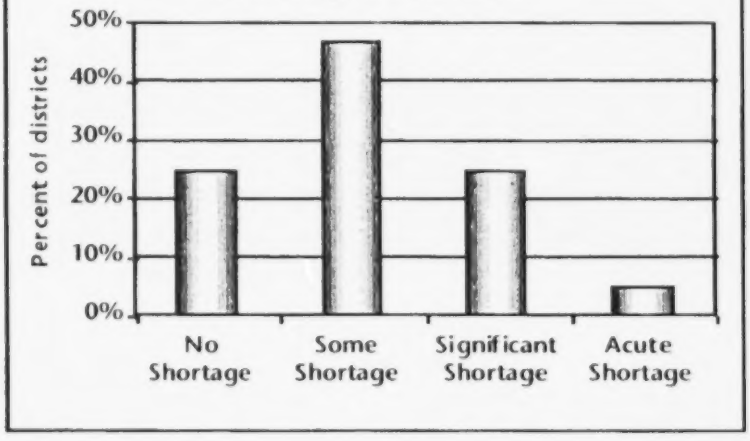
—Written comment from a district director of human resources

One of the contradictions in this study is that three out of four districts claim they are facing a shortage, yet when asked to quantify the nature of the problem, two-thirds of responding districts do not point to a decline in the numbers of applicants per position. As Figure 9 indicates, only one-quarter of responding human resource directors report they face no shortage (24%). Nearly half (46%) point to "some shortage", with one-quarter (24%) claiming a significant shortage. Just 5% report they are facing an "acute shortage."

What is intriguing about the districts claiming a shortage (three-quarters of those responding) is that many of them had a comparatively high number of applicants per vacancy, and most had suffered no change in the size of their applicant pool over seven years. Yet seven years ago little, if anything, was heard about a shortage of school principals.

Certainly there is no magic or correct number of applicants per principal opening. Rural districts, as noted above, can be satisfied with one candidate, if he or she is the right person. Conversely, some human resource directors with the largest numbers of applicants per vacancy indicate their district has a significant, or even an acute, shortage. And other districts with fewer than ten applicants per vacancy reported "no shortage."

Figure 9: Perceptions of District Officials About the Extent of the Shortage in Their District



It appears that among those anxious about a shortage, much of the concern turns around the quality of the applicant pool, not its quantity. Much of this new focus on quality appears to be based on increased pressure on school leaders to improve student performance. When achievement results are unsatisfactory, district leaders focus on the principal. With stricter accountability plans now in place, district leaders also need to think in terms of a school's potential results with each new principal hired. In this context the stakes in hiring each new principal are much higher today than they were seven years ago. And finally, when recent hires don't deliver student results, district leaders reflect on the "quality" of their principals, reasoning that more capable principals could have produced better test scores.

Factors such as these seem to lie behind the anomaly reported above—no decline in applicants accompanied by reported shortages. In this vein, several human resource directors wrote that they are unhappy with the candidates they receive. Some respondents thought the quality had decreased in recent years. But many more claimed that their district now demands more from principals than in the past—so it is the requirements that have changed, not the applicant pool. "Now principals must be instructional leaders in their schools. Previously, principals were perceived as administrators and disciplinary individuals," wrote one district official. Another wrote: "Principals are now more accountable for curriculum, test scores, and budgets." Yet a third concluded: "It takes a different kind of principal to do this job."

One in three survey respondents among human resource directors indicated that increases in principals' responsibilities to improve student performance make it harder to find able candidates. "We

[have a hard time finding] principals with experience supervising low-performing classrooms," said one school official. Another lamented that it was particularly difficult to find "principals able to deal with resistance to change and innovation." One district official summed up the high level of expectations of school leaders in biblical terms: "Our candidates need to be able to walk on water," he said.

In a separate survey, superintendents also reflected the view that finding "qualified" principals is a significant challenge. (As will be noted later in this report, superintendents probably are looking for qualifications in potential principals that extend well beyond holding a credential.) Among superintendents in the study, 80% noted that getting qualified school principals was either a moderate or a major problem (see Table 2). Just 6% of responding superintendents said it was not a problem.

Table 2
Superintendents Report that Finding Qualified School Principals Is a Problem

Percent of superintendents who believe that getting qualified school principals is:	Not a problem	A Slight problem	A Moderate problem	A Major problem
	6%	14%	41%	39%

In truth, the challenge for many districts is now one of finding principals who can produce results that few expected from any principal, even in the recent past. Clearly, if certification ever predicted performance, it no longer does. As a result, districts with ample supplies of certified principal applicants still complain about the quality of their applicant pool. As one district official with lots of certified applicants wrote "Raising test scores is a big push in the state right now—we're trying to find principals who can help teachers with what they need to do."

In many ways, the "shortage" problem is a matter of definition. Defining the problem in terms of the number of certified applicants is only part of the story. Clarifying what districts really want in school leadership applicants is the other part. As the next major section of this report makes clear, districts are searching for characteristics far beyond minimal state certification requirements. Then they compound their difficulty by defining an idealized set of attributes that they seek in their principal candidates (who, after all, should walk on water) while making hiring decisions that bear little relationship to the attributes sought.

Principals: What Do We Know About Demand?

As accountability systems focus on achievement at the building level, expectations for principals' performance rise: a good principal becomes one who can raise tested student achievement. Anecdotally, it is clear that superintendents have new and higher expectations for principals and a sense of frustration when performance is lacking. This study confirms this anecdotal evidence.

The study team wanted to know how new expectations for principal performance play out in the hiring process. In most districts, the director of human resources recruits and screens the applicants, ranks those who survive the initial cut, and forwards only those that he or she deems qualified for final consideration. The study team found that human resource offices often screen people based on qualities different from those superintendents are seeking.

The clearest distinction between the two sets of survey respondents (superintendents and HR directors) is that superintendents now seek people with serious leadership skills while hiring staff report focusing most on education experience, typically defined as years of teaching experience. Because leadership skills do not necessarily relate in any way to lengthy teaching tenure, superintendents often find themselves dissatisfied with the people placed in principals' chairs.

The View from the Superintendent's Office

Amidst increasing pressure to raise student performance, superintendents look at principals as the key to improvement. A Public Agenda Foundation survey of superintendents, for example, found that nearly half are unhappy with the current ability of their principals.[20] The same study also reported on superintendents' faith in principals as the key to turning around failing schools. Nearly seven of ten superintendents (69%) believe that "given the right leadership, even the most troubled schools would be turned around."[21]

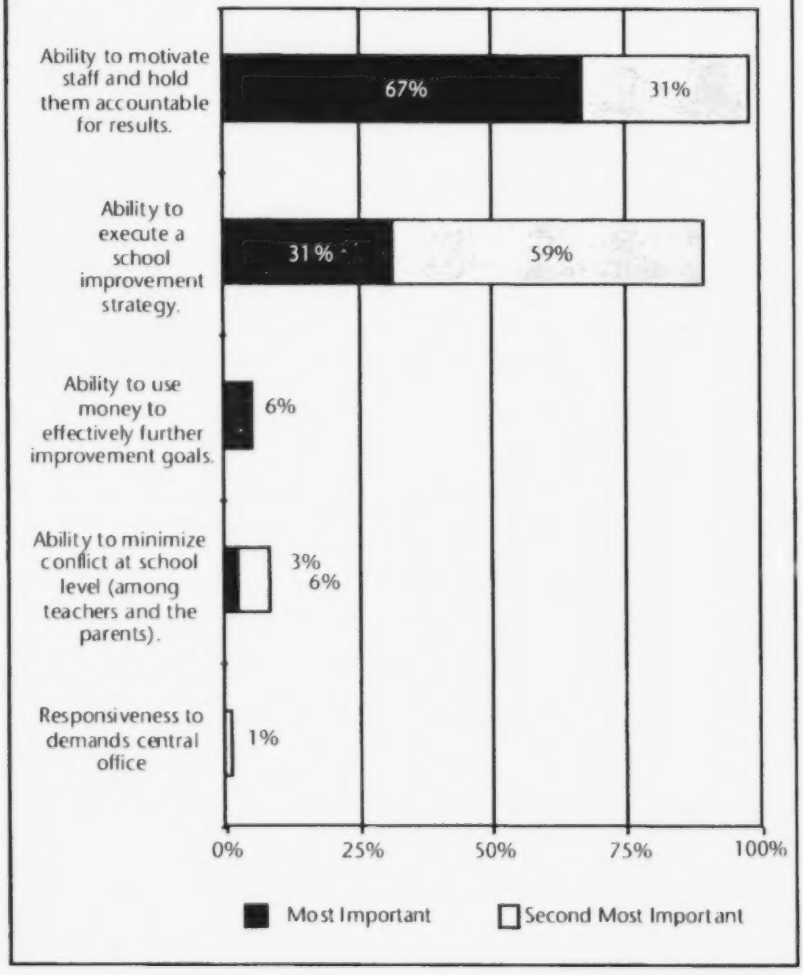
The research reported here is consistent with Public Agenda's findings. It provides evidence that superintendents expect impressive leadership attributes from principals. Where once district leaders may have expected principals to act as line managers responsible for implementing district-wide policy, tending to administrative tasks and record-keeping, and maintaining buildings and order, today they seek a leadership orientation, centered on complex skills involving defining a vision, developing strategy, and motivating staff and teachers.

The world of the superintendent has changed. Most are insisting that principals change with them. Toward that end, superintendents consistently send a similar set of signals about the new skills they seek in today's new principal.

Key Attributes Point to Leadership Skills

In the survey of superintendents, the team asked respondents to rank-order the most important attributes of a successful principal. Selected attributes ranged from traditional responsibilities (responsiveness to the central office) to emerging demands (execute a school improvement strategy). As Figure 10 illustrates, superintendents are much more interested in leadership attributes from principals than

Figure 10: Superintendents rank order skills that principals need



they are in management skills. There is nearly universal agreement that motivating staff and holding them accountable for results is the key skill a principal needs. An overwhelming 98% of superintendents define that ability as either the "most important" or "second most important" skill sought in a principal.

Close behind motivating staff comes executing a school-improvement strategy. Here 90% of respondents find it either the "most important" or "second most important" attribute. Using money effectively to further improvement goals, something that few principals would have been charged with as recently as ten years ago, finds favor with nearly six out of ten responding superintendents.

On the other hand, the survey reveals less interest on the part of superintendents in traditional roles of principals. Less than half think of minimizing conflict at the school level as among the top three concerns of the modern principal and the importance of responding to central office demands is dismissed almost entirely.

The attributes these superintendents seek in a principal, therefore, turn around leadership skills involved in motivating staff, stressing accountability, developing and overseeing broad improvement strategies, and bringing resources to bear on problems as they develop.

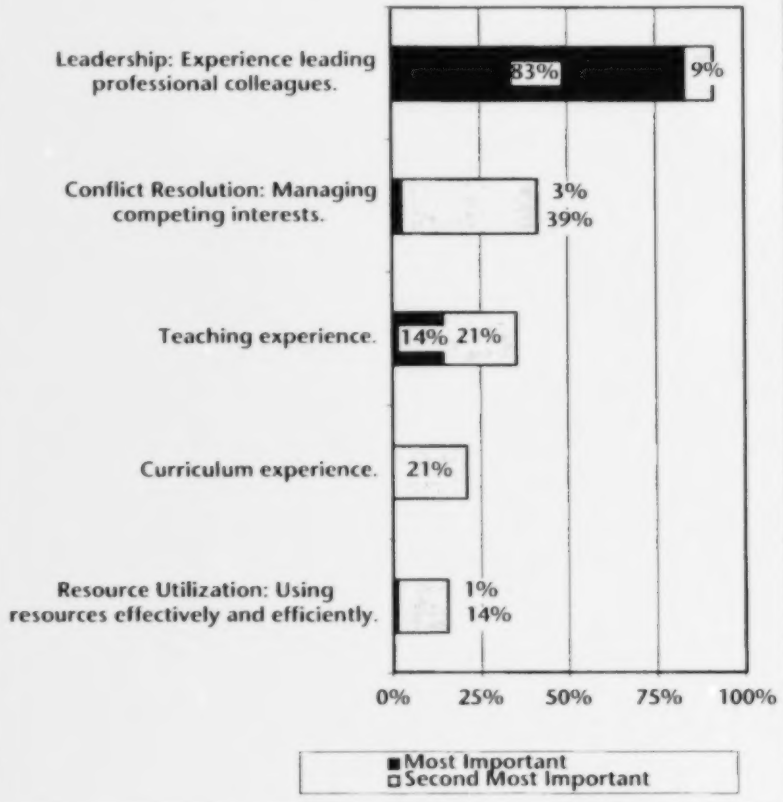
Superintendents Value Certain Experiences

In keeping with the skills they seek, superintendents also have a sense of what kinds of experiences help develop those skills so that aspiring principals can bring them to the job. To understand how superintendents might align the skills they seek with candidate experience, they were asked to rank-order the most important experiences required to be a principal. Figure 11 displays the responses.

As is clear from Figure 11, broad leadership experience again trumps a traditional background in education in the eyes of responding superintendents. More than nine out of ten (92%) point to a background of leading professional colleagues as either the "most important" or "second most important" experience. Conflict resolution and managing competing interests, a key leadership skill, comes in behind leading professional colleagues, with 42% citing it as either the "most important" or "second most important" experience.

Conflict resolution appears to be much more important to superintendents in terms of experience than it is as a "skill," a finding that is difficult to interpret. More than one-third of respondents cited conflict resolution as important under both skills and experience, but the rank-order in each category differs considerably. It is conceivable that conflict resolution is much more significant to superintendents than they indicate under skills. Possibly they thought of "conflict resolution" as "keeping things under control" in one set of questions, while realizing that genuine leadership always involves harmonizing conflicting interests in the other.

Figure 11: Superintendents Rank Order Experiences That Principals Need



A similar anomaly presents itself with regard to resource utilization. As a skill, superintendents value it highly (see Figure 10). Nearly 60% consider it to be an important skill and it ranks third among the five possibilities. But in terms of experience, only about one in seven superintendents cites it as significant (15%) and it ranks fifth out of five possibilities. It seems likely that superintendents understand that effective principals must be able to manage resources effectively and that this skill is absolutely essential. However, when it comes to the other dimensions, it may be that most superintendents are uncomfortable citing resource management as an essential experience since it is likely to be one that cannot be met without prior tenure as a principal.

One of the striking results in these survey results is the relative lack of interest superintendents display in traditional indicators of school leadership experience: a background in teaching or curriculum.

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When forced to choose the most important two or three experiences they seek in potential principals, a background in teaching or with curriculum seem to be distinctly second fiddle. Only about one-third of respondents point to teaching experience as highly significant (35% consider it "most important" or "second most important"). And only one-fifth point to a background in curriculum as highly desirable (21% cite is as "second most important" and nobody defined it as "most important").

In looking for new principals, therefore, school superintendents clearly want candidates who can lead their professional colleagues and bring some order out of the cacophony of competing interests in play on the typical campus. While district offices may pay lip service to these desirable qualifications, it is equally apparent that human resource directors are making selection recommendations on distinctly different grounds.

HR Departments–Marching to a Different Drummer

In the separate survey of human resource directors, it was apparent they march to a different drummer. At first blush, everyone seems to be on the same page. Human resource directors obviously feel strong pressures to improve the quality of principals hired. In separate interviews, they also speak of the need to find candidates who meet districts' changing needs. For example, they were likely to say that high-quality candidates are especially important right now given changes and stresses in the field of education. As one put it: "The profession of principals has changed. There is now more emphasis on academic leadership, on guiding and training teachers, and being a leader in the community."

So, in many ways, human resource officials point in the same general direction as the superintendent when thinking about the kinds of skills new principals should have. Human resource professionals, like superintendents, are inclined to believe that leadership matters.

However, when push come to shove in terms of experience, personnel people look in a different direction. While asserting they want people with leadership skills, they rely on experience in teaching to cull their candidates.

Experience in Teaching and in Schools Is What HR Professionals Value

The evidence from the survey and the interviews could not be clearer. As a group, human resource directors interpret the messages they receive from superintendents quite narrowly. Most human resource professionals interpret the demand for improved quality as a call for more experience in education. In open-ended questions, some 41% spoke of the need for more years of experience

in schools. For HR directors, the link between experience and quality was a given. "Greater experience means they are going to do a better job," said one director. Another tied classroom experience directly to competence and preparation as an administrator: "The more experience one has in the classroom, the better they will be prepared as an administrator."

The surveys and interviews with human resource professionals provided abundant evidence that they understand both the importance of leadership and new demands on schools and principals. They comprehend that these factors demand higher-quality principals and, consequently, drastically increase pressure on the search process. One human resource director commented: "The principal job has become more complicated—our district has added additional job responsibilities for principals. Experience is now more important than ever."

This study finds no evidence that human resource professionals have perversely ignored the new forces at play in the selection process, or that they do not understand what superintendents seek. In many cases, indeed, personnel professionals spoke of preferring candidates with lots of experience not only in education, but also as successful building administrators: "It is hard to find applicants with administrative experience," said one, clearly implying that such experience was desirable.

Yet it was also apparent that when superintendents emphasize the need for leadership traits, human resource directors filter that through a frame that defines "leadership" as "leadership experience in public education." Conceiving of and establishing a local nonprofit, no matter how large or successful, would be irrelevant experience to most human resource directors. Candidates demonstrating success as an entrepreneur, a lawyer, or as a product manager in a local firm would never make it past the first cut in most human resource offices. And the team received the distinct impression that leadership in a local private school, whether religiously-affiliated or not, would be viewed as a distinct disadvantage in many human resource offices.

The result, of course, is that career educators fill most vacant principals' positions, a consequence arising in part because human resource offices advance such candidates and eliminate others. Early reports from the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) show that 99.3% of all public school principals have been a teacher. In fact, although superintendents rank-order teaching experience as only third in the list of experiences they think desirable (see Figure 11), the average public school principal today has 14 years teaching experience.[22]

And, whereas, superintendents seemed to have only limited interest in candidates with a background in curriculum, human resource directors consider such a background highly desirable. They spoke of looking for candidates with knowledge of curriculum and instructional leadership. As one wrote, "Our district now has higher demands for supervision of staff, [which means] principals need more knowledge of curriculum and instruction."

Many others mentioned that they sought candidates with experience in the specific district doing the hiring. New hires from within the district already know the ropes and understand the district's policies and procedures. "Those from within the district understand the culture and policies of the district," said one official. In essence, minimizing demands and questions of the central office becomes a dynamic driving human resource offices expressing this view. "The less experienced principals need to ask for more help," said one of these officials.

In a process that no one designed or anyone would defend, hiring in these situations proceeds in such a way that it simultaneously undermines leadership potential while overwhelming the ability of superintendents to change the school culture in which principals are chosen. What started out as an effort to find a building leader capable of improving student achievement turns into a search for someone who will make few if any demands on the central office. It's an organizational variation on the old school game of "whispering down the line." What superintendents end up with rarely resembles what they set out to find.

Ideal Candidates Are Inherently Scarce

With greater pressure to hire quality candidates, human resource directors have not done what would be expected. They have not changed the criteria under which they hire; they have simply become more intent on meeting traditional criteria. More specifically, they seek candidates with lots of teaching experience, a state license or credential as a principal, and one or more stints as a building administrator, preferably in a comparable school and ideally in the hiring district. Candidates who meet all these criteria are normally older, some of them close to retirement age, meaning they, in turn, will shortly need to be replaced.

The numbers of such older candidates with a track record of success as a principal, who also happen to be looking for a new position, is even smaller. As one district with high salaries, little turnover and a relatively large applicant pool admitted. "[We'd like to] screen for prior principal experience, but are lucky when candidates have even a bit of experience as a vice principal."

As the stakes get higher, and district leaders further emphasize the

need for quality principals, human resource departments become less willing to take risks on candidates with atypical resumes. Without a pool of ideal candidates, HR directors resort to those that meet at least some of the traditional criteria—namely years of teaching experience. So teaching experience and certification begin to stand in for teaching, certification, and experience as a building administrator. "The last principal we hired had no experience as an administrator, but has 15 years as a teacher," reported one district official.

Human Resource Directors Are Comfortable with Their Hires

Despite ignoring the skills and experience sought by the superintendent (and acknowledged by human resource officials to be needed), nearly nine out of ten human resource directors (87%) report that new hires meet most or all of their expectations. This finding may illustrate nothing more than the commonplace that people can persuade themselves that the reality they see is the reality they want. It may also be an indication that once people have been hired, their superiors are inclined to overlook shortcomings and concentrate on strengths.

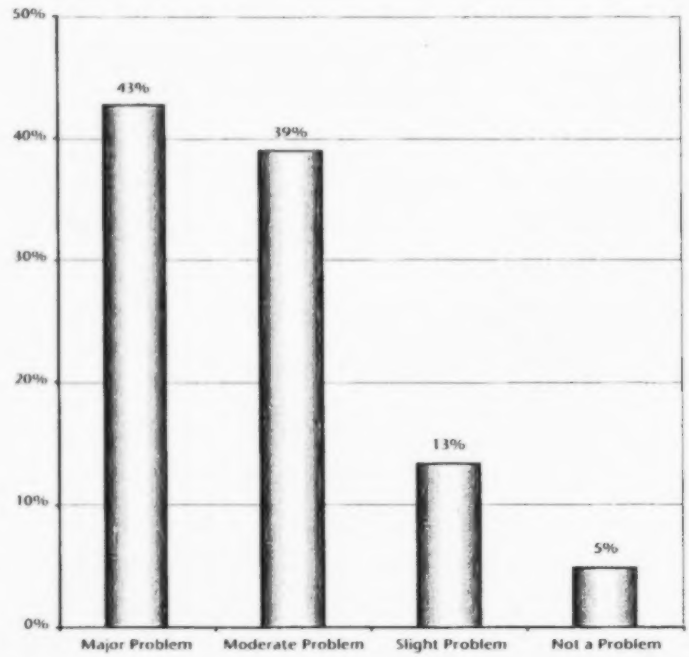
In interviews, human resource directors generally felt that while they were having trouble finding candidates with enough experience, their new hires were doing quite well. When we asked if their success would suggest that they modify their criteria to rely less on career educators, the overwhelming majority said no: "We have found that our applicants come with fewer years of leadership experience than we would like. The ones we have hired have done a good job though. But greater experience is still preferred."

Superintendents Still Dissatisfied

Despite the satisfaction of human resource directors with their new hires, superintendents continue to express their unhappiness. It is not surprising therefore (see Figure 12) that superintendents report finding good school principals to be a real challenge. Only 29% of human resource directors felt there was an "acute" or "significant" shortage of principals (see Figure 9 in Part One). Among superintendents, however, fully 82% agree that finding principals is either a "major" or a "moderate" problem. These diverse views seem to reflect that larger disconnect between what the superintendents want from new hires and the criteria human resource offices use to recruit and screen candidates.

These views may also contribute to, as well as reflect, the disconnect. Superintendents are alarmed about the need to find good principals because they are worried about student achievement and convinced that schools need new and better leadership. But where one stands,

Figure 12: Superintendents Report Difficulties Finding Principals



depends on where one sits. Human resource directors, convinced that they've done the best they can, believe the principals they've found function well as school leaders. In that sense, human resource directors have been able to explain away the problem.

As a practical matter, this situation plays itself out in the following way: districts ignore the criteria for school leaders enunciated by the superintendent. Above every other conceivable experience, superintendents reported they wanted experience leading professional colleagues in new principal hires. As it stands, some human resource departments are successful at finding candidates with previous experience as a principal or vice principal. But with four out of ten districts (41%) reporting trouble finding leadership experience, the district and the human resource director simply defaulted to candidates with many years of teaching experience. Most of these had little or no experience in leadership roles of any kind.

These findings indicate a need to distinguish between two distinct categories of experiences: First, there are the valuable experiences that candidates gain from their work as teachers (skills in instruction, competence with the complexities of curriculum, and a familiarity with the inner workings of schools and districts). No one can

deny that such a background has value and utility, if only because instruction and curriculum lie at the heart of learning. Second, there are leadership experiences gained from roles in which potential principals define a vision of the organization, identify what it needs to accomplish, lay out a strategy of what is involved in getting there, motivate adults in the organization around this new strategy, and, ideally, hold them accountable for producing results.

While superintendents see these two sets of experiences as distinctly separate, human resource directors appear not to understand this. Even if they do, the way they act belies their understanding. Human resource offices act as though ample teaching experience serves as a proxy, or even a substitute, for complex leadership skills.

Superintendents probably bear some responsibility for this state of affairs. Although superintendents have been clear that they seek leadership attributes (and perhaps the ability to walk on water), they have not been particularly clear about where human resource directors can find these paragons. What is obvious is that simply peering deeper into the pool of traditional educators is not working very well in many districts. While some districts are placing more demands on local university-based principal training programs—or stepping up efforts to "grow your own" leaders by cultivating talent within the district—most do not have long-term strategies for improving their candidate pool.

Human Resource Directors Steer Clear of Non-traditional Candidates

School officials could conceivably, under the right circumstances, seek new building leaders outside education. But such an approach is at best hard to imagine and, at worst, appears to be the furthest thing from the minds of human resource offices. Possibly constrained by state mandates and certification requirements, most do not give non-traditional candidates even a passing glance. Indeed, it is difficult to avoid concluding that most non-traditional candidates probably do not survive the first cursory inspection of the human resource department's office manager.

For this study, "non-traditional candidates" were defined as those outside education or those with three or fewer years as a teacher or in another public education setting. Over 80% of the districts in our survey received applicants from candidates who did not meet state certification requirements. Nearly every district received candidates with very limited experience in education—candidates hoping to move into building leadership after fewer than three years teaching experience. Others received applicants from lawyers, accountants, psychologists, non-profit leaders, and university professors. Despite policies that discourage non-traditional candidates from applying, it

is clear that many are interested.

Yet these non-traditional candidates do not fare very well in the selection process. Human resource directors are very reluctant to put such candidates in principals' positions. While a third of the human resource respondents admit that they might be forced to hire candidates with fewer years of experience in education than traditionally expected, they report they generally do not consider someone relatively new to the field (with fewer than three years experience). When presented with the option of hiring non-educators, the resistance is so palpable as to be nearly physical.

In some cases, state certification requirements block these candidates. Newly hired, un-certified principals will eventually need a principal's credential, which can be granted initially on a provisional or emergency basis. Typically, permanent credentials require three years of teaching experience (or up to five years educational experience in three states) and successful completion of a principal training program.[23] (It is interesting to note that principal training programs also, understandably, have entrance requirements. What is not understandable is that many of these programs in effect bar non-educators from easy access. Like a guild guarding entrance to the inner sanctum, many graduate administrator training programs require in effect, that non-traditional candidates take a new undergraduate major in education before they can enroll. While many non-traditional candidates, even those with graduate degrees, are willing to enter principal training programs, they are not likely to revisit undergraduate instruction as a prerequisite. An administrator from one training program admitted that if they "...removed these barriers, it would open the floodgates for non-traditional candidates."[24])

But in some ways the licensure requirement is simply a convenient excuse for personnel offices. Most states have procedures for waiving certification. Still, human resource directors acknowledge that they are primarily interested in candidates with many more years of teaching experience than the minimal requirements outlined in state licensure regulations. In fact, as noted above, the norm for a new principal today is 14 years of teaching experience, more than four times the minimal amount required by most states. In the face of this mind-set in screening offices, non-traditional applicants stand little chance. And, in fact, when non-traditional candidates apply to districts for vacant principals positions, human resource directors acknowledge that they are not interested. Three quarters of the HR Directors indicated in their surveys that they do not even circulate these applications with the others. They are simply filed away or discarded.

How Districts Cope

Most districts cope with the reality or the threat of "shortage" reasonably well. Even districts already feeling the pinch, or feeling it in selected schools, find a way to work out their difficulties. The study team is aware of no district, anywhere, that closed a school because it could not find a principal to lead it.

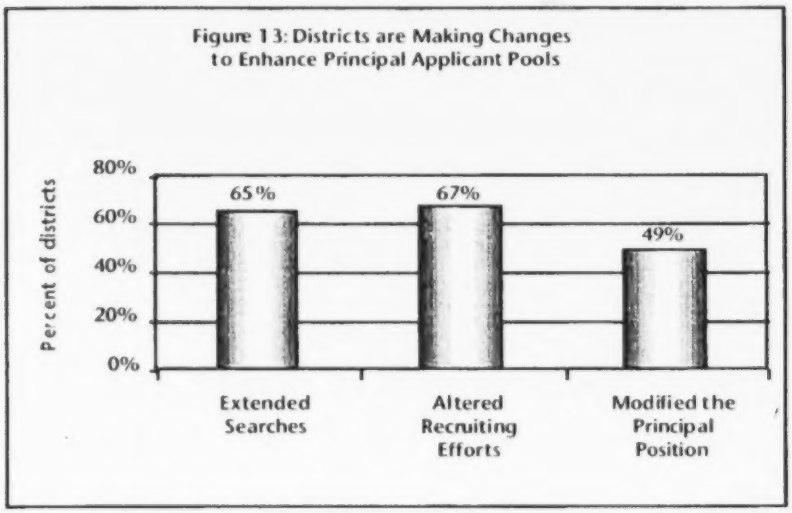
Whether driven primarily by anecdotal evidence in a few districts, changes in quality, or fear of impending shortages, districts do seem to have a heightened awareness of issues related to the size and quality of their applicant pools. For some districts, this awareness has taken hold pro-actively, in anticipation of a future problem.

The Shortage Is Looming: Several human resource directors suggested that although they are not experiencing a shortage today, they anticipate one tomorrow, defined as in the near future. One reported that her district had experienced very little turnover in recent years. "But we expect more in the future because of age and retirement," she said. Other district officials had similar comments, with many worrying that they would be harder and harder pressed in the future to find candidates who are certified, able and interested.

In the human resource directors' survey, a slow trend toward increases in principal openings across the surveyed regions appeared. Over seven years, the number of openings in the ten regions increased by an average of 15% per region. Roughly half of this increase can be attributed to population growth (with the number of schools in sampled districts increasing by 7.2% during the 7 years.) The remaining increase in openings reflects a trend toward more vacancies as a result of either higher turnover among principals, or greater percentages of incumbent principals at retirement age. A forthcoming RAND report on the career paths of school leaders indicates that principals are an aging group and that some of the concern about future increases in retirements may be justified.[25]

Most districts are hard at work trying to build up the supply of candidates. And, as will be noted in Part Three of this report, states and universities are also making an effort toward this end.

Whether or not they have already experienced changes in the number of applicants per opening, most districts clearly are trying to anticipate problems. Several of the changes underway indicate a move afoot on the part of school leaders to encourage region-wide labor supply approaches for districts searching for candidates (see Figure 13). In the survey of human resource directors, two-thirds (67%) report altering their recruiting efforts, primarily by advertising more broadly, and recruiting from neighboring districts. Here the Internet, sometimes the bane of educators' lives, becomes an ally, making it easier for districts to cast a very wide net as they seek to pull in candidates.



Many districts (65%) are also extending the length of searches, with a third appointing interim principals and a third claiming to start the search process earlier. A related strategy—"grow your own" leadership programs—has proliferated recently, particularly among districts dissatisfied with the quality of their current applicants. Districts trying to cultivate their own candidates have formal and informal mechanisms for identifying promising principal candidates within the ranks and providing them with leadership development training. Over 90% of the districts in the Center's survey indicated they had some internal recruitment program. And three out of four HR directors confirm their preference for local candidates; they claim that the best source of principal candidates is the district itself.

Another strategy is to redefine the position in some way. Nearly half of respondents indicated they had modified the position of principal, primarily by changing the role or compensation. Over a third have increased salary and other compensation. Another 12% have made changes that redefined the role of principal. A few have added mentoring programs with the goal of increasing the likelihood that promising candidates, having been identified and groomed, will be successful and remain on the job.

Finally, a common response that may ultimately be self-defeating, is to recruit principal candidates out of retirement. This strategy fits well with the requirement that candidates have building leadership experience and a career history in education. While a third of the districts have followed this path, it is potentially self-defeating in the sense that it cannot serve as a viable long-term strategy in most locations.

A Matter of Definition

In Part One, the study suggests that the problem of principal "shortages" is in some ways a matter of definition. Quantitatively, it is hard to make a case that a broad and widespread "shortage" of school principals exists or is likely to develop in the immediate future. By traditional conventional measures, most districts have more than enough candidates to staff their school leadership needs and, in fact, the nation has a more than ample supply of people certified to become school principals. One may wonder what it is about the job that makes it unattractive to people eligible for it, but it is hard to argue that producing more "certified" people will by itself persuade them to assume responsibilities that so many already prefer to avoid.

The "matter of definition' in Part One has to do with what is meant by "shortage." Although not widespread, it is very real in some districts. Part of the policy maker's task becomes how to respond to the challenges of these real "shortage" districts. This can be thought of as the challenge of inter-district leadership equity. This task needs to be taken up with a clear understanding that the solution is not directly related to the overall supply of principal candidates.

Yet another matter of definition remains as well. While this matter involves some policy elements also, for the most part it requires school leaders at the district level to get their act together. If superintendents define desirable principal leadership qualities in one way and their subordinates select new hires on the basis of different qualities, no statewide or national policy changes can save districts (and local schools) from the consequences of such dysfunctional management. Here, the matter of definition becomes one of making sure that the left hand knows what the right is doing and that both act together for the common good of the community and its students.

In Part Three, the study concludes with some options for addressing the "matters of definition" outlined in this report.

School Principals: Addressing Supply and Demand

Most current strategies to increase the supply of high quality principal candidates center on efforts to bolster the supply of traditional applicants. Enhanced recruiting, early identification of potential leaders, expanded training programs, and improved salaries are among strategies thrown into the mix.

Several states, for example, have commissioned studies to report on the status of principal leadership, and some have followed up with policy changes. In Massachusetts, the state legislature put aside funds specifically for principal recruitment and training.[26] In Mississippi, there is a "New Fellowship License" program which permits provisional candidates to serve as principals while they finish working on their credentials.

Simultaneously, university-based principal training programs have tried to respond. Some are expanding, others are re-examining themselves to see if they can yield additional certified candidates. Still other training programs have been created specifically to address the quality of trained candidates.[27] Many of these newer or more innovative programs include fast-track intensive curricula, residencies or internships, and mentoring. All of these efforts are designed to better prepare candidates and increase the likelihood that principals will remain in their positions longer.

What all of this solid and desirable effort at the state and campus level indicates is a powerful conviction that expanded applicant pools and improved training programs will solve the challenges facing districts in their quest to find better principals.

Yet, as this report demonstrates, neither bigger applicant pools nor better training programs (nor a combination of the two) appropriately addresses the problems outlined by the data. They respond to anecdotes and to educators' deeply held beliefs, but they largely ignore the reality of the "shortage" revealed by the data.

The evidence from this study centers around two distinct issues with policy implications: First, there is no doubt that some non-competitive districts are experiencing trouble finding applicants for principal openings. But this shortage is a distribution problem, affecting only a small portion of all districts, (see Figure 2, Part One). For these districts, the policy challenge is how to encourage certified candidates to take more interest in openings in their schools. A related problem is that potential principals avoid some schools (even in some districts with no district-wide shortage.) Here again, the challenge does not require a broad approach affecting recruitment and hiring practices everywhere, but a discrete response to improve the attractiveness of these placements.

Second, for many other districts, perhaps most, the problem has been that districts are not hiring applicants who meet the superintendents' stated interest in powerful leadership skills. With no real shortage in most of these districts, this part of the problem is related more to the demand than the supply side. Appropriate solutions for this second problem are very different from those required for the first and should address how districts organize themselves to recruit, select, and hire candidates.

Three distinct strategies directed specifically at the two problems identified by the data, appear to offer the greatest hope of improving school building leadership:

- Adjust incentives to make non-competitive districts and schools more attractive to potential candidates (get the incentives right).
- Restructure district recruitment processes and align search criteria with expectations for principal performance (make sure the left hand knows what the right is doing).
- Redefine the principal position where essential (bring all available talents to bear on the challenges the position presents).

Get the Incentives Right

Not all principal positions are created equal. Some are tougher assignments, with larger enrollments, uncooperative parents, chronically low scores, difficult labor relations, and student populations coping with the realities of poverty, community dysfunction, and strained racial relations. In the private sector, leaders taking on such complicated challenges are likely to expect additional compensation and stature. As economist Michael Podgursky explains, positions "that require greater training or draw on relatively specialized skills typically command higher earnings. Alternatively, some tasks involve greater stress and less pleasant working conditions. Other things being equal, these too will command higher earnings."[28] To the extent that private employers recognize such realities, it does not seem unreasonable to expect public-sector employers to acknowledge them also.

But for school leadership, there is little evidence of career progression or varying compensation within the principalship. In a RAND study of school administrator career paths, researchers found that school characteristics explained very little in terms of principals' career paths.[29] The RAND findings showed only small increases in principal experience from small to larger schools, with principals in larger

schools earning slightly more on average than those of smaller schools. The RAND study also notes that despite the greater challenges associated with high school positions, elementary and combined school principals "have about one more year experience than high school principals".[30] Most surprisingly, the RAND report finds evidence that "schools with higher poverty and school conflict problems tend to have principals with less experience."

Without market forces governing the distribution of talent, it is not surprising that principal applicants avoid districts with fewer monetary and non-monetary benefits (i.e. high schools and schools with more challenging student populations or offering lower salaries). While incentives do exist in some locations, the fact remains that addressing the distribution problem will require adjusting incentives in most districts and many states to attract the best candidates to the most troubled schools.

Money Does Matter. In schools as elsewhere in the nation's economic life, money makes a difference. It is clear that principals respond to diverse incentives. As shown in this study, principals avoid districts with certain combinations of undesirable factors or deterrents. Among these factors are lower salaries, which clearly play a role in the distribution of principal applicants. For struggling districts, this translates into extremely small applicant pools and serious difficulty filling vacancies in schools most in need of expert leadership. For such districts, one strategy may be to improve the incentives, particularly the ones over which they have some control. Income and bonuses are two things that might be looked at, along with school size and leadership supports.

Balance Talent Among Schools. Similar factors are at play within districts, even some that, overall, seem to enjoy quite large applicant pools. Several districts have used various salary incentives to lure better candidates to more challenging schools within their districts. In Los Angeles, for instance, the salary schedule for principals is based on the student demographics of the school. A principal serving in a school with higher percentages of students in poverty receives a higher salary than one serving traditionally suburban children. Other factors include the school size and schedule (year-round schedules pay more). The result? As one district official put it, "Pay seems to be the biggest factor" in determining how many applicants apply to each school. School district U-46 in Illinois has a similar policy with three salary ranges depending on student demographics and total enrollment.

Clearly some school districts have not hesitated to follow where common sense leads: In the most difficult districts and schools, money can make a big difference.

Policy Implications

Salary is a powerful inducement and can help districts overcome some of the disincentives that plague some schools. If implemented correctly, principal salary variations within districts can help create a career path for principals, in which rookies start out in less complex schools and move to higher paying, more challenging assignments as they accumulate experience, skills, and a reputation for leadership.

Use salaries to make tougher assignments more desirable for the best candidates: A role for districts.

Changes in principal salary structures should reflect the variations in the job challenge and the effort required. It should be sufficient to overcome the inherent disincentives that accompany some assignments. But most importantly, it should serve to attract some of the best leaders to schools that need them the most. If it succeeds, it will help redefine the public-school-principal career path as one in which more experience, skill and capability are brought to bear on tougher assignments.

Solutions must address the distribution among districts: A role for states.

While districts should be able to manage the distribution of candidates among their own schools, there are no comparable mechanisms available to solve the distribution problems that hurt some districts. Without some external force adjusting the incentives among districts, the least desirable districts will be left with very limited ways in which they can try to become more competitive. They can raise salaries, but the reality for many of these places is that their resources are more limited than neighboring districts. Although two states do have programs designed specifically to expand the pool of qualified teachers in hard-to-staff schools, [31] there are no analogous programs to address the inter-district distribution problem for principals.

There is clearly a role for states here. This is an important policy objective that should not be left to serendipity or the private sector. It is not a problem the federal government created and it is unlikely to set out to solve it. Yet it is clearly an issue that states should take up, particularly since every state has been busy crafting the sort of accountability systems that have created the pressure for better principals.

Rethink Human Resource Practices: Hire the Best Candidates

Though few districts faced an absolute shortage of people with the legally required qualifications, many felt quality was in short supply. Where certification was initially developed to be a proxy for competence or capability, it is clear that school leadership now requires very different capabilities than are guaranteed by the present licensing and hiring process.

Make Sure the Left Hand Knows What the Right Is Doing

As the evidence from this study demonstrates, human resource directors rely primarily on traditional criteria, including certification, years of teaching experience, familiarity with the district, and experience as a school administrator when available. While these criteria worked well for human resource directors, in that the majority were satisfied with their new hires, superintendents appear to be less satisfied with the results. The superintendents had been hoping to hire applicants with critical leadership qualities that are uncommon among applicants with traditional qualifications.

The question arises: why would HR directors continue to rely on candidates that are unlikely to meet the expectations outlined by the superintendent? Dale Ballou (1996) studied a similar phenomenon in the context of teacher hiring practices where he concluded that administrators avoid candidates with stronger academic backgrounds. He suggests that the reason for this counter-intuitive practice is one of cultural bias. Administrators favor candidates with backgrounds similar to their own. Further, he concludes, "the market pressures that force managers to reevaluate practices and policies in other areas of the economy are absent or much weaker here." [32]

A parallel conclusion might apply here. HR directors prefer traditional criteria because they themselves were selected based on these criteria. Additionally, districts are filled with career educators and there is some suspicion of outsiders. Following this line of reasoning, the fear of newcomers may encourage HR directors to prefer a fairly narrow set of candidates, even if this set rarely meets the expectations of superintendents. With little accountability at the HR level for performance, these dysfunctional hiring practices are permitted to continue.

Addressing Human Resource Practices. Personnel policy may appear unglamorous and seemingly unrelated to the core education mission. But the truth is that human resource offices exert a profound impact on personnel and building-leadership quality across the board. Superintendents will never find the building leaders they seek as long as human resource offices continue to recruit and cull candidate lists with the criteria they now use. The two sets of desirable criteria are so different that it is not surprising that there is little match between what the superintendent seeks and the human resource office provides.

Superintendents concerned about the quality of the principals their district is hiring need first to address the current practices within the HR department. The reality is that much of the blame for inadequate principal quality is misplaced on the supply side, when it should be directed to processes within the districts.

Consider Non-Traditional Candidates. One place superintendents might start is with the human resource directors' preference for school principals who are traditional educators, trained in traditional ways, with a lot of experience in the classroom. At a minimum, superintendents should insist that the three-year minimum of classroom experience is adequate for inclusion in the selection pool.

But beyond that, superintendents should insist that human resource offices put into the selection pool every candidate who has held a comparable leadership position in the profit or non-profit worlds. It is quite true that such people may have no experience in education. But it is equally true that many traditional educators have little experience in leadership positions—and the principal's job is above all a leadership effort. And while it is impossible to demonstrate a link between success as, say, a non-profit head with success in the principal's office, it is equally impossible to demonstrate any linkage between years in the classroom or possession of a principal's certificate with success as a building leader.

Some evidence exists that many non-traditional candidates are up to the challenge. Uniformly, university training administrators express how impressed they are when people such as lawyers, accountants, psychologists, former officers in the Armed Services, business executives, non-profit leaders, and Peace Corps volunteers apply to their programs. (Like their district counterparts in human resource, universities rarely accept these applicants due to licensure constraints.) The point is that knowledgeable and experienced observers think such people are potentially first-rate school leaders.[33]

In addition, in the few cases where school principals came from private industry, interviews with school district officials indicate these principals are doing well—and are even "exceptional."[34] Similar approval is offered to principals who arrived in public school systems from private and parochial schools.

The evidence is far from complete, but it is suggestive. Many candidates from non-traditional backgrounds have a lot to offer public schools in building-leadership positions. In many ways, principals are both leaders and educators. If the object is to put the best possible people into principals' offices, it makes as much sense to start from the leadership side of that equation as the educational side.

Policy Implications

More research is needed to find the link between qualifications and desired attributes: a role for states, the federal government and philanthropy.

The link between qualifications and performance in school leadership positions is unclear at best, and a mystery at worst. No one can say with any certainty what qualifications or background will yield better school leaders. In reality, there is almost no empirical

evidence to justify most of the certification requirements for today's administrators.

States, the federal government, and philanthropists should create partnerships to explore the links between qualifications and desired outcomes, for both traditional and non-traditional principal candidates.

Real change in the way human resource offices do their business is essential: a role for superintendents, boards and districts.

With pressure to hire "better," human resource officials have retreated to hiring "safer." Human resource personnel need to overcome the history, habits, and cultural biases that have led them to favor a narrow set of candidates in recent years. In this area, further exploration of the organizational behavior of HR directors would help. Policy options include those that bring some accountability not only to districts, but also to human resource offices so that they provide districts with the building leaders required to meet the changing demands in schools.

Progress in changing personnel practices will likely be slow at first. But in all likelihood, subtle changes in the characteristics of current building leaders will pave the way for others.

Barriers to entry need to be examined: a role for policy analysts, researchers and legislators.

Experimenting with non-traditional candidates will require changes in some licensure requirements, options for alternative certification, or creative alternatives to school leadership definitions. Some states are now revising or removing their licensure requirements with mounting evidence that traditional requirements do little to guarantee performance.[35] In addition, new fast-track training programs are actively targeting candidates from other fields and occupations. Some new programs are able to grant provisional or temporary certification, others include internships that satisfy some education experience requirements. Another option is to follow the path of districts with non-traditional superintendents, by renaming the leadership position (calling it a director, president, or some other title) and thus avoiding the certification requirements.[36]

Non-traditional candidates will need special training: a role for academic institutions.

No sensible observer believes that it makes sense to throw people unfamiliar with education into school leadership positions and leave them to sink or swim. Clearly non-traditional candidates are likely to require special training. More training programs geared directly toward these non-traditional candidates may be needed—both to better attract able leaders from outside the education profession and to augment skills for those with limited education experience. As some district officials noted, principals from other industries were less familiar with school district policies. Other options, such as sharing leadership with an experienced teacher, could also satisfy this need. These options are discussed more fully in the section below.

Redefine the Role of Principal

If for some districts the outlook appears grim, a third major possibility is to simply redefine the demand side by reshaping school leadership roles. By this, we mean that districts may want to direct their efforts toward changing the principal role rather than continuing to complain about inadequate employees.

This suggestion falls squarely into the current debate about what the functions of a school leader involve. Some believe that an effective building leader is, of necessity, an expert on teaching and learning and even curriculum design.[37] Others suggest that finding ways to construct co-leaders, or head teachers, or other devices may permit schools to draw on a wider variety of leadership models. Here, university leadership may be a useful analogy. In some colleges and universities, the president sees himself as the point person dealing with the public, funders, and state legislators, leaving it to chancellors, provosts, and deans to deal with other university constituencies, including faculty, staff, and students. On other campuses, the president sees herself as the key to holding all the major internal and external constituencies together, dealing frequently with faculty and students and leaving fund-raising to the Office of Development. And, of necessity, heads of small private liberal arts colleges frequently develop a quite distinct leadership style from the head of a nearby state land-grant multi-versity. Given that leaders in another, highly respected, educational endeavor display many diverse leadership styles, behaviors, and models, might such an approach not make sense in public education?

Building on this report's findings, a guiding objective for re-aligning leadership responsibilities should be to create positions that can be successfully executed by the current applicants. But on this point, it is important to be clear. Aligning expectations with the available labor pool does not simply mean lowering standards. Rather, it means finding other means to fulfill some expectations that cannot be met by available individual candidates. In any even relatively small school district, a lot of talented people exist. Some way should be found to bring all of that talent to bear on the problem of leading schools.

Some schools are already experimenting with such new leadership arrangements. In Hawaii, many private schools have separated leadership responsibilities between a chief executive officer (CEO) and an instructional leader. (In San Diego in recent years, a similar experiment has taken place in the superintendent's office, with a non-traditional superintendent who is a lawyer acting as CEO and a traditional educator leading curriculum change and acting as "chancellor.") In the Hawaii private schools, CEOs need not demonstrate a background in education; instructional leaders, on the other hand, have to come from education. To date, according to reports

from the Hawaii Association of Independent Schools, those schools experimenting "with this co-leadership model...are having success with it." [38]

Independent schools in Virginia and Ohio also report similar arrangements under which some "school heads" have limited if any teaching experience. Large schools then have "division heads" for each level (lower, middle and upper schools). The division heads are "virtually always selected from those with lengthy and strong teaching experience" reported an official from the Ohio Association of Independent Schools. The "school heads" are selected for their overall leadership capabilities.

Other options have been proposed for redefining the role of the principal, including delegating tasks, developing leadership teams, and contracting out for specific expertise or selected functions. Another report in the Center's Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds study focuses more specifically on the changing role of the principal and may illuminate other ways in which principal roles can be successfully fulfilled.[39]

Concluding Remarks: Accomplishing Group Purpose

Leadership is a powerful topic. But, as John W. Gardner, a great friend of American education and the founder of Common Cause once said, "Attention to leadership alone is sterile.... The larger topic of which leadership is a subtopic is *the accomplishment of group purpose....*"[40]

It is, by now, widely accepted that the diverse aims of American public schools need to be understood within the focus of the common group purpose of providing opportunities for all children to learn (regardless of race and poverty). That broad purpose is poorly served if the challenges to leadership are misdiagnosed, or statements about the nature of the problem are poorly framed.

As this report makes clear the nature of the "shortage" of school principals in the United States is very much a matter of definition. Overall, by any reasonable definition, no shortage exists. But in particular districts, and in particular schools, there is a real problem finding people to serve as principals. The problem is in fact acute in these cases since certified candidates offered the opportunity to serve in these schools shun them. The tragedy of this situation is that in all too many cases these are the very schools most in need of outstanding leadership.

Many other districts face a separate unrelated problem—that of selecting the best candidates. Here the source of the problem is

within the district, where the task of hiring vibrant new school leaders is confounded by the inheritance of archaic attitudes and processes on the part of the central office. For the most part, directors of human resource offices seem intent on relying on selection criteria unrelated to the leadership skills schools need.

This report suggests that responses to these challenges should not be knee-jerk reactions to hypothetical widespread shortages but tailored to the nature of the problems described here. First, in order to address the problem of candidates avoiding some districts, incentives should be applied appropriately to even the distribution of certified and able candidates. For the second problem, that of hiring better candidates for school leadership, our findings indicate that much of the problem resides within districts where selection criteria conflict with desired attributes. Here, districts need to resolve these inconsistencies in order to hire the best possible candidates or redefine the role of principal so that its responsibilities can be met in alternative ways.

Appendix A

Survey Instrument for Human Resource Directors

Please answer the following questions based upon your experiences.

1. To what extent do you feel your district is currently experiencing some degree of shortage in qualified applicants for the principal position? (circle one)

No shortage Some shortage Significant shortage Acute shortage

2. In your district, please roughly estimate the average number of applicants (that meet state requirements) that you received for each principal vacancy in this last year: (circle one)

0-3 4-6 7-10 11-20 21-40 >40

3. How many principal vacancies did you have in this last year?_____

4. To what extent did the principal(s) hired this last year posses the characteristics your district sought? (circle one)

Met all expectations Met most expectations Lacked some characteristic
Lacked many characteristics Position notfilled

5. In what year did you begin work in this district's personnel office? (check one)

❑ **2000** ❑ **1999** ❑ **1998** ❑ **1997**
❑ **1996** ❑ **1995** ❑ **other, please specify:**_____

6. Thinking back to your first year working with this district, roughly how many **applicants** did the district receive for each principal opening in that year?

0-3 4-6 7-10 11-20 21-40 >40

7. Approximately how many principal **vacancies** did you have in that first year of your service?

_____

8. To what extent did the principal(s) hired that first year of your service posses the characteristics your district sought? (circle one)

Met all expectations Met most expectations Lacked some characteristic
Lacked many characteristics Position notfilled

9. Have the needs of your school district changed since you were hired? (please explain briefly)

_____

10. Which characteristics are currently hardest to find in your principal applicant pools?

11. How has the search process for a principal changed in response to the shortage?

Check any that apply.

Extended searches by:
❑ **Appointing interim principals**
❑ **Maintaining vacancies**
❑ **Starting the search process earlier**
❑ **Other** _____

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Altered recruiting efforts by:
- ❑ Advertising more broadly (web sites, regional/national publications)
- ❑ Use of a recruiting firm
- ❑ Recruiting from private schools
- ❑ Recruiting from neighboring districts
- ❑ Targeted recruiting in other regions
- ❑ Other: _____

❑ No Changes have been made

12. At the start of the 2000-2001 school year, approximately how many schools were operating with interim principals?

_____

13. If interim principals are used to fill principal vacancies, approximately how long do they serve? (check one)

❑ 0-3 Months ❑ 4-7 Months
❑ One school year ❑ More than one school year

14. Does your district receive applicants that do not meet state requirements?

❑ No If yes, roughly how many per opening? _____

15. What do you do with applicant resumes that do not meet state certification? (check one)

- ❑ Keep them in a separate file
- ❑ Circulate them with the others
- ❑ Discard them
- ❑ Other: _____

16. Which, if any, of the following "non-traditional" candidates for the position of principal does your district hire? (check all that apply)

- ❑ Those from outside the field of education
- ❑ Former principals out of retirement
- ❑ Candidates with fewer years experience in education than traditionally expected
- ❑ Candidates with fewer academic credentials
- ❑ Those requiring temporary/provisional/or emergency certification

❑ Other: _____

17. What are the sources for your best applicants? (check any or all that apply)

- ❑ Nationwide recruiting
- ❑ Certification programs.

Which ones? _____

- ❑ Candidates from within the district
- ❑ Candidates serving in other districts
- ❑ Candidates serving in private schools
- ❑ Non-traditional candidates (as defined in the above question)
- ❑ Don't know
- ❑ Other, please specify:

18. Do you have an internal recruitment program whereby you encourage the district's teachers to become principals? (please check)

❑ Yes ❑ No

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19. How (if at all) has the district modified the position of principal to more effectively recruit or retain principals? (check all that apply)

- ❑ Redefining the role of principal or redistributing its responsibilities
- ❑ Creating job sharing
- ❑ Revising expectations of candidates
- ❑ Changes in salary, pension, and other compensation
- ❑ School loan forgiveness
- ❑ Subsidized housing or mortgage loan forgiveness, etc.
- ❑ Other: _____

❑ No changes have been made

20. In your view, what conditions in your district make it relatively difficult to draw in principal candidates? (check all that apply)

- ❑ Complex student population in comparison to neighboring districts
- ❑ Low salaries in comparison to neighboring districts
- ❑ Competitive labor market in your region
- ❑ Increased job pressures related to low student performance
- ❑ Other: _____

21. How much influence does each group have in the decision of which principal candidate to hire?

(please circle the number rating)

Strong				Weak
District officials including superintendent				
5	4	3	2	1
School board				
5	4	3	2	1
School staff/school council				
5	4	3	2	1
School community/parent groups				
5	4	3	2	1
Other				
5	4	3	2	1

22. Does your district historically track principal turnover in each of your schools? (please check)

❑ Yes ❑ No

23. Does your district track and monitor the quality and size of the principal applicant pool from year to year? (please check)

❑ Yes ❑ No

24. Does your district estimate or project future needs for principal candidates? (Please check)

❑ Yes ❑ No

25. How has the shortage affected schools in your district? (For instance, has your district had to contribute more resources toward recruiting? Are you experiencing higher principal turnover? Do you see changes in instructional leadership or community relations at your schools or is there decreased teacher morale? etc.)

_____

26. Is there anything else you think that we should know?

_____

Survey Questions for Superintendents Referenced for Principal Shortage Study

Personnel Challenges

- Many superintendents express concern regarding shortages of qualified central office administrators, building leaders, and teachers. Please circle the number which best describes your assessment of these personnel challenges.

We face challenges in finding qualified *deputies and central office staff.*

NOT A PROBLEM	SLIGHT PROBLEM	MODERATE PROBLEM	MAJOR PROBLEM
1	2	3	4

We face challenges in getting qualified *school principals.*

NOT A PROBLEM	SLIGHT PROBLEM	MODERATE PROBLEM	MAJOR PROBLEM
1	2	3	4

We face challenges in getting qualified *teachers.*

NOT A PROBLEM	SLIGHT PROBLEM	MODERATE PROBLEM	MAJOR PROBLEM
1	2	3	4

- What, in your mind, are the most important *attributes* of a successful principal. *Please rank the following from 1 to 5 (with 1 being the most important):*

- ☐ **Ability to execute a school improvement strategy.**
- ☐ **Ability to motivate staff and hold them accountable for results.**
- ☐ **Ability to minimize conflict at the school level (among teachers & parents).**
- ☐ **Responsiveness to central office demands.**
- ☐ **Ability to use money effectively to further improvement goals.**

- What, in your mind, are the most important *experiences* required to be a principal. *Please rank the following from 1 to 5 (with 1 being the most important):*

- ☐ **Conflict resolution: managing competing interests.**
- ☐ **Leadership: experience leading professional colleagues.**
- ☐ **Resource utilization: using resources effectively and efficiently.**
- ☐ **Teaching experience.**
- ☐ **Curriculum experience.**

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Endnotes

1. Some data about the number of applicants per opening is reported for the New York City public schools in various sources, including *Crisis of Leadership*, produced by New Visions for Public Schools, <http://www.newvisions.org/resources/report4_1.html>.

2. See for example, National Association of Elementary School Principals and National Association of Secondary School Principals. (1998). *Is There a Shortage of Qualified Candidates for Openings in the Principalship?* Educational research Service; and also a variety of state studies including those from Connecticut, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, Montana, North Carolina, and Vermont: Meter, Eddy J., McMinn, Cynthia, Quintero, Martie Fee. *Examining the "School Principal Shortage Crisis" in Kentucky: A Perspective from Kentucky School Superintendents.*

The Maryland Task Force on the Principalship. *Recommendations for redefining the role of the principal; recruiting, retaining, and rewarding principals; and improving their preparation and development.* Equity Assurance and Compliance Office, Baltimore, MD. 2000.

McMinn, Cynthia, Van Meter, Eddy J., Quintero, Marti Fee. *Examining the "School Principal Shortage Crisis" in Mississippi: A Perspective from Mississippi School Superintendents."* Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Leadership Development and Enhancement. 2000.

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3. National Association of Elementary School Principals and National Association of Secondary School Principals. (1998).

4. Hinton, Leslie, Anne and Jonathan Kastner, *Vermont's Principal Shortage.* University of Vermont, Vermont Legislative Research Shop, May 1, 2000.

5. McMinn, Cynthia and Eddy J. Van Meter and Marti Fee Quntero, *Examining the 'School Principal Shortage Crisis' in Mississippi: A Perspective from Mississippi School Superintendents.* Mississippi Department of Education, 2000.

6. Sandra L. Barker, *Market Trends in School Administration: The Case in Washington State.* Seattle: Seattle University, April 1996.

7. Maryland Task Force on the Principalship. *Recommendations for Redefining the Role of the Principal.* Annapolis: Maryland State Board of Education, August 30, 2000.

8. Relying on individuals to recall history is not ideal. In fact, with HR directors believing there was at least some shortage, we can only assume that most would tend to overstate the differences between previous applicant pools and today's actual figures. We accounted for some of this error by including ranges for the size of applicant pools, which eliminates small variations. Additionally, since the recall data did not suggest substantial (potentially exaggerated) disparities, the team was comfortable with the reported findings.

9. The figures for the percent of children in poverty and minority children were obtained directly from district materials.

10. Housing in districts with six or fewer applicants per position typically averages $121,000; in districts with seven or more applicants, housing prices average $151,000.

11. See, for example, Prince, Cynthia D. (2002).

The Challenge of Attracting Good Teachers and Principals to Struggling Schools. American Association of School Administrators. Arlington, VA.

12. Some districts serve students from all grades (i.e. kindergarten through 12th grade), while others serve only elementary students or only high school students.

13. National Association of Elementary School Principals. *Is there a Shortage of Qualified Candidates for Openings in the Principalship? An Exploratory Study.* Educational Research Service, 1998.

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14. National Association of Secondary School Principals and National Association of Elementary School Principals. *The Principal, Keystone of a High-Achieving School: Attracting and keeping the leaders we need.* Educational Research Service, 2000.

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15. Bell, Elizabeth. "Schools' principal shortage: fewer teachers want the job's growing challenges." The San Francisco Chronicle. September 23, 2001. & Hilton, Leslie-Anne and Kastner, Jonathan (ibid).

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17. Jordan, Daniel W., McCauiley, Huey S., Comeaux, Jill B. *The Supply and Demand Trends of Public School Principals and Administrators in Southwestern Louisiana: 1993-1997.* ERIC doc. July 1994.

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20. Farkas, Steve; Johnson, Jean; Duffett, Ann; Foleno, Tony; Foley, Patrick. *Trying to Stay Ahead of the Game: Superintendents and Principals Talk about School Leadership.* Public Agenda, New York, NY. 2001.

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Public Agenda, New York, NY. 2001., page 7.

22. National Center for Education Statistics.

Schools and Staffing Survey: 1999-2000: Overview of the Data for Public, Private, Public Charter & Bureau of Indian Affairs Elementary and Secondary Schools. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. May 2002. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/2002313.pdf>.

23. Gates, Susan; Ross, Karen; Ringel, Jeanne; Kimmerling, Mina. *Career Flow of Principals and Superintendents.* RAND. Santa Monica, CA. (Forthcoming)

24. This comment surfaced in a phone interview with a representative from New Leaders for New Schools. October, 2001.

25. Gates, et.al,

Career Flow of Principals and Superintendents. RAND. Santa Monica, CA.

26. Phone interview with personnel at the Massachusetts State Department of Education. 2000.

27. For an excellent summary of these new programs, see *The Principal, Keystone of a High-Achieving school: Attracting and Keeping the Leaders We Need.* Produced by Education Research Service for the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Association of Secondary School Principals. (2000).

28. Podgursky, M. (2001). "Regulations versus markets: The case for greater flexibility in the market for public school teachers," p. 137, In Wang,, M.C., & Walberg, H.J. (Ed.s), *Tomorrow's Teachers,* pp. 117-148. Richmond, CA: McCutchan Publishing Corporation.

29. Gates, et.al,*Career Flow of Principals and Superintendents.* RAND. Santa Monica, CA.

30. Gates, et.al,

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31. Prince, Cynthia D. (2002). *Higher Pay in Hard-to-staff Schools: The Case for Financial Incentives.* Produced by the American Association of School Administrators, Arlington, VA.

32. Ballou, Dale (1996). "Do public schools hire the best applicants?" *The Quarterly Journal of Economics,* February.

33. Information from interviews with representatives from training programs, including a representative from New Leaders for New Schools, October, 2001.

34. These comments surfaced from phone interviews with districts and organizations overseeing principals with backgrounds in private industry.

35. Two states, Michigan and Florida, have recently removed the requirement that principals be certified.

36. The relevant example is San Diego, where Alan Bersin was hired as "CEO" since he does not hold a superintendent's certificate.

37. The remarkable school leadership efforts directed by Lauren Resnick and her colleagues at the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh appear to be grounded in the assumption that school principals -and even superintedents -- should be leaders on teaching and learning within their buildings.

38. Based on an interview with the Executive Director of the Hawaii Association of Independent Schools.

39. Portin, et al. (2002). Forthcoming report from the Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington. Seattle, WA.

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